A Holy People? Tradition, formation, and mission in contemporary British Methodism

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Abstract

The Christian church in twenty-first century Britain faces a significant missiological challenge in which serious attention to Christian formation will be vital if Christians are to provide credible witness to the gospel, both individually and communally. Christian formation – a modern term – describes the early Wesleyan holiness tradition, now 'lost' to contemporary British Methodism, but which, it is argued, has potential for recovery.

The thesis examines the early Wesleyan holiness tradition, including John Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection and the communal practices of the early Methodists, establishing its roots in the virtues and the affections. Envisioned as a relational process of gradual growth toward perfect love of God and neighbour, it became, after Aldersgate, an attainable goal, albeit in the context of ongoing growth.

An examination of six key individuals who, after Wesley, played pivotal roles in modifying, transforming, or departing from the tradition establishes that, under the influence of American holiness revivalism, the tradition in Britain was reinterpreted in Pentecostal terms, emphasising instantaneous attainment and the 'Second Blessing,' whilst its gradual formational nature was lost. A lack of engagement with the needs of the world contributed to its neglect in the twentieth century, and eventual 'loss' in post Second World War Britain.

New perspectives in Christian formation, particularly the rehabilitation of the virtues, the role of the affections, and Christian practices as means of grace, together with the emphasis on formation in community and engagement with the world, provide a basis for contemporary recovery, signs of which are already present. Suggestions are offered as to how Methodism might begin to re-express its historic tradition.

The thesis concludes that Methodism has the opportunity to recover and reintegrate the essential dynamics of the early Wesleyan holiness tradition into its life and mission, informing its practice of Christian formation, and rediscovering its foundational call to become a 'holy people' for the sake of the world.

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Abbreviations

Works	*The Works of John Wesley* (Bicentennial Edition), general editors Frank Baker, Richard P. Heitzenrater, and Randy L. Maddox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975-83 and Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1984–), 21 of 35 vols. published to date.

1 Introduction – In search of a lost tradition

> The Methodist Church…ever remembers that in the providence of God Methodism was raised up to spread scriptural holiness through the land by the proclamation of the evangelical faith and declares its unfaltering resolve to be true to its divinely appointed mission.
>
> Deed of Union, 1932[1]

1.1 Research Conception: a personal project

This thesis addresses the question: can holiness, so central to the Christian vision of John Wesley and the early Methodists, yet gradually 'lost' to their successors,[2] become again the vital concern of contemporary British Methodism, informing its practice of Christian formation and guiding its mission?[3] This chapter begins by describing how a personal concern for the future of Christianity in Britain led to the conviction that the Christian formation of the people of God is vital to the handing on of faith and to successful Christian mission, which in turn encouraged my re-engagement with the 'early Wesleyan holiness tradition' and to the formulation of the research.[4] Following an outline of the methodology used to assess its potential for retrieval, the chapter proceeds to establish that the early Wesleyan holiness tradition has become a 'lost' tradition within Methodism where the emphasis has been most recently placed on discipleship. It concludes by arguing that Britain's changed religious landscape presents the Christian Church with a sustained missiological challenge in which the Christian formation of the people of God will become increasingly important, and it is

[1] *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, vol. 2 (London: Methodist Publishing, 2017). The Deed of Union brought together the previously separated Wesleyan, Primitive, and United Methodists to form The Methodist Church in Britain.

[2] It might be thought that to speak of a lost tradition is hyperbolic, but so marked is the phenomenon that this thesis examines that alternative words, such as 'demise' or 'neglect' fail to do it justice.

[3] Unless otherwise indicated, reference to the Methodist Church and Methodism refer to The Methodist Church in Britain and British Methodism.

[4] The term 'early Wesleyan holiness tradition' refers to the understanding of holiness as expressed in the thought and practice of John Wesley and the early Methodists during his lifetime.

in this context that the proposed re-engagement with the early Wesleyan holiness tradition is warranted because it is, in essence, Christian formation by another name.

Mission

The Christian Church in twenty-first century Britain faces a daunting missiological task: how will the Gospel of Jesus Christ be passed on, believed, and witnessed to by coming generations? This is the underlying concern that drives this research. It has been a persistent theme throughout my ministry, first surfacing in 1982 on my appointment to the Hull East Methodist Circuit where research on church affiliation revealed that only 1% of the population were communicant members of the Church of England.[5] When Methodist members and other denominations were taken into account, I estimated only 3.5–4% of the population had any regular church affiliation. This fuelled the need to answer the question: how would the Gospel make inroads in such a context? A move to York in 1987 would begin to provide an answer, albeit from an unlikely source.

As minister of the former Centenary Chapel, York, I became accustomed to seeing a memorial to Wesleyan minister, David Hill (1840-1896), a former member of the church, who, as the inscription revealed,

> gave his life, with his many talents, large opportunities, and all his substance, for thirty-two years to the evangelisation of Central China with a generosity that knew no stint, with an eagerness that never grew weary, a self-forgetfulness, humility, and courage, wedded to toil, which increasingly revealed the deep, broad sympathy of his soul and the saintliness of his character.[6]

[5] The research by local vicar, David Attfield, remains unpublished as confirmed in an email exchange dated 26 September 2016, although some of its ideas were incorporated in David G. Attfield, *Proclaiming the Gospel in a Secular Age: A General Theory of Religious Communication* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).

[6] See photograph in J. E. Helier, *How David Hill Followed Christ* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1903), p. 255.

When I enquired further, there was little anyone could add other than some reference to Hill being 'the Livingstone of China.' In the busyness of pastoral ministry, I made no effort to learn more, despite vaguely remembering that I had been given a book, *David Hill, Friend of China,* by the family of a former China missionary whose funeral I had conducted in Hull.[7] That book lay languishing on my bookshelves, unread, until Sunday 4 June 1989, when the crushing of the student protest in Tiananmen Square led me to seek it out. I read it in a sitting, captivated and stirred, abandoned my prepared sermon for that evening, and spoke instead of David Hill and China.

The events of that afternoon led me to research Hill's life, and to appreciate that the memorial's reference to 'the saintliness of his character' was no Victorian hagiographic veneer – the facts of his life spoke for themselves. Moreover, I was intrigued that the first biography of Hill should be entitled, *David Hill: Missionary and Saint* – 'saint' being an unusual Methodist designation.[8] But his was clearly a Christ-like life – and this seemed crucial. In the formidable mission context of nineteenth-century China, where missionaries were despised, Christian missions made little impression, and conversions were few, it was the patient, dedicated, and selfless life of Hill – and others like him – that provided the credible witness that eventually gave birth to faith and to small but growing Christian communities.

Formation

Reading of David Hill's struggles in unpromising circumstances provided the necessary reminder that Christian witness and the sharing of faith has never been easy, or cost-

[7] Harold B. Rattenbury, *David Hill, Friend of China: A Modern Portrait* (London: Epworth Press, 1949).
[8] W. T. A. Barber, *David Hill: Missionary and Saint*, Third ed. (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1899).

free, but requires perseverance, dedication, and a life consistent with the Gospel. Hill's experience in nineteenth-century China resonated with my own in late twentieth-century Britain. I recognised that the key to faithful witness lies in the quality, integrity, and depth of Christian faith and practice, nurtured and exhibited in the lives of ordinary, everyday Christians and church communities. This led to the growing conviction that Christian formation is of critical importance for Christian mission.

That conviction has been affirmed and strengthened during my doctoral studies at King's College, London, in particular through an appreciation of the missiological outworkings of George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Christian Doctrine*[9] and the emphasis on tradition, virtue, character, and practices in the ecclesial ethics of Stanley Hauerwas[10] and the philosophy of Alasdair MacIntyre.[11] Consequently, I chose Christian formation as the subject for my Ministerial Focused Study (MFS) and, by means of a qualitative and quantitative survey among ministers of one Methodist District, concluded that intentional Christian formation has yet to become an established part of Methodist Church life and culture.[12] This suggested that further research in the area of Christian formation was warranted.

[9] George A Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984).
[10] Stanley Hauerwas is an acclaimed American theologian and ethicist, whose background is the United Methodist Church.
[11] Alasdair MacIntyre is a Scottish philosopher, now living in the USA, whose critique of liberal capitalism has led him from being an exponent of Marxism to Aristotelianism and subsequently to Thomism. His book, *After Virtue* (1981), established his reputation as one of the key moral and political philosophers of our times, who has stimulated renewed attention to virtue ethics.
[12] David Mullins, 'Becoming 21st Century Disciples: A study of intentional faith development and discipleship training in the churches of one Methodist District' (Ministerial Focussed Study, [year-long empirical study in DThMin programme], King's College London, 2011).

Tradition

A research proposal began to crystallize when I was struck by the resonance between Christian formation and John Wesley's desire and intention 'to raise an holy people.'[13] This found expression in the communal practices of the early Methodists and was rooted in Wesley's understanding of sanctification and doctrine of Christian Perfection. The fact that I – baptised, nurtured, confirmed, and ordained within the Methodist Church – had not previously appreciated this link between Christian formation and the early Wesleyan holiness tradition is itself a pointer to the demise or loss of that tradition within modern Methodism, no longer informing Methodist life and practice as once it did.

Surprised by this striking resonance, a research proposal took shape. I wanted to revisit my 'lost' tradition, understand it fully (for the first time), trace the course of its subsequent development, find out the reasons for its demise, and consider its potential for recovery. Could Methodism be fashioned anew as a 'holy people,' re-expressing its founding identity for twenty-first century mission? A working title came as a gift: *A Holy People? Tradition, Formation, and Mission in Contemporary British Methodism*. The question it seeks to answer may be summarised thus: In the light of its founding importance and subsequent development and demise, to what extent and in what ways may the early Wesleyan holiness tradition, constituted by John Wesley's desire 'to raise an holy people,' his views on holiness and Christian Perfection, and the accompanying communal practices of the early Methodist people, be retrieved to

[13] John Wesley, 'Minutes of Several Conversations between the Reverend Messieurs John and Charles Wesley, and Others' (1770, 1772), §5, in Henry D. Rack, ed. *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley, Vol. 10: The Methodist Societies: The Minutes of Conference* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2011), 10:875. Henceforth, Wesley, *Works*.

inform the understanding and practice of Christian formation in the contemporary mission context of The Methodist Church in Britain?

1.2 Methodology: a study in Practical Theology

The nature of the research question invites a broad-based discussion encompassing a wide range of theological disciplines. The thesis is essentially a study in practical theology emerging from pastoral engagement and theological reflection over the course of thirty-nine years of ministry conducted in a variety of contexts – what James Woodward and Stephen Pattison describe as 'a place where religious belief, tradition and practice meets contemporary experiences, questions and actions and conducts a dialogue that is mutually enriching, intellectually critical, and practically transforming.'[14] This resonates with John Wesley's own theological approach: 'practical divinity,'[15] focussed on the expression of theological convictions in the everyday lives of Christian disciples. Wesley's practical divinity resonates with Stanley Hauerwas's description of 'faith as performance,' leading John Swinton and Harriet Mowat to claim that practical theology 'is dedicated to enabling the faithful performance of the gospel.'[16] My research adheres broadly to this understanding of practical theology as it subjects the beliefs and practices of the Methodist Church in relation to holiness – from its early Wesleyan form to the present – to critical, theological reflection.

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[14] James Woodward and Stephen Pattison, eds., *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

[15] See, for example, the title page of Wesley's *Christian Library* where he refers to the contents as "extracts from, and abridgements of, the choicest pieces of practical divinity which have been published in the English tongue," cited in Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), p. 178.

[16] 'Practical Theology is critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world. John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), pp. 4, 6.

Research Method

The nature of the research question thus suggests the method by which it is to be addressed. Various principal strands of enquiry are pursued, explored, and brought into dialogue throughout this thesis. They include:

1. **The early Wesleyan holiness tradition** as expressed in John Wesley's theology and the communal practices of the early Methodists. This strand draws on Wesley's own writings and a wealth of biographical, historical, and theological material issuing from the resurgence in Wesley and Methodist studies since the 1960s, deriving largely from the United States.
2. **The development and interpretation of the tradition** in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: given the difficulties of providing a sufficiently detailed historical analysis of such an extended period within the limits of this thesis, this strand comprises six case studies that focus on key individuals as representative examples who played pivotal roles in modifying, transforming, or departing from the tradition during the period, and confines itself to Wesleyan Methodism, the largest of Methodism's branches prior to Methodist Union in 1932 (because it would have been unwieldy to incorporate all the branches of Methodism in such a limited study) and to The Methodist Church in Britain after 1932. Essential resources include biographical, historical, and theological material drawn from primary and secondary sources.
3. **The new perspectives on Christian formation** that have emerged amongst Christian educationalists, theologians, and ethicists, as well as some recent stirrings of interest in holiness within the contemporary church, both within and beyond Methodism, that indicate potential for retrieval.

These strands of enquiry will facilitate a 'critical conversation,'[17] in which the early Wesleyan holiness tradition, its subsequent development and interpretation, perspectives on Christian formation, and my personal reflections are the participants. It is my belief that the time has come for a fresh appraisal of the early Wesleyan holiness tradition in the context of a growing holistic and ecclesial understanding of Christian formation. My conviction is that the early Wesleyan holiness tradition still has much to offer, not only to contemporary Methodism, but to the wider church in revitalising its practice of Christian formation – a conviction which this thesis develops.

1.3 A discipleship movement shaped for mission

At its 2011 annual Conference, the Methodist Church set a new course for the twenty-first century when it received the strategic report of its General Secretary, Martyn Atkins, *Contemporary Methodism: a discipleship movement shaped for mission*, and commended it to the Methodist people 'for study, response and action.'[18] The report – the fruit of more than a decade of discernment – offers a vision of the life, work, worship, and mission of the Methodist Church, encapsulated in a new self-description of its identity and purpose as 'a discipleship movement shaped for mission.'[19] This pithy and memorable phrase clearly echoes the 'mission-shaped' language of the Fresh

[17] 'Critical conversation' is Stephen Pattison's term for a model of theological reflection in which the researcher 'imagines herself being involved in a three way conversation between (a) her own ideas, beliefs, feelings, perceptions and assumptions, (b) the beliefs, assumptions and perceptions provided by the Christian tradition (including the Bible) and (c) the contemporary situation which is being examined.' Stephen Pattison, 'Some Straw for the Bricks: A Basic Introduction to Theological Reflection,' in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. James Woodward and Stephen Pattison, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p. 139.

[18] Martyn Atkins, 'Contemporary Methodism: a discipleship movement shaped for mission [The General Secretary's Report],' The Methodist Church, http://www.methodistconference.org.uk/media/41172/2-the-general-secretarys-report-0511.pdf accessed 08 July 2011.

[19] The origins and development of this 'new ecclesial strapline' has been further explored in Roger L. Walton, 'A discipleship movement shaped for mission: forming a new ecclesial identity for British Methodism?,' *Holiness* Vol 1, no. 1 (2015), http://www.wesley.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/04-walton.pdf accessed 22 May 2015.

Expressions initiative, launched by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and the Methodist Church in 2005,[20] and emphasized by Atkins in 'Mission-shaped Thinking,' his contribution to *Changing Church for a Changing World: Fresh ways of being church in a Methodist context*.[21] It is also reminiscent of Methodism's origins as a 'movement' rather than 'church.' It is, however, the adoption of the word 'discipleship' that is particularly striking, even if not altogether surprising given its prominence in contemporary Christian discourse as well as being the subject of Atkins' 2010 publication, *Discipleship and the People Called Methodists,*[22] where he first employs the terminology of discipleship to describe Methodism, making a direct appeal to Methodist tradition, stating that 'in its origins and roots, its heart and soul Methodism is a discipleship movement.'[23]

When we turn to that early tradition, however, in order to discover what John Wesley himself understood the essence of his movement to be, we find scarce mention of 'discipleship' terminology.[24] Instead, the emphasis is on another word – 'holiness.'

> By Methodists I mean, a people who profess to pursue (in whatsoever measure they have attained) holiness of heart and life, inward and outward conformity in all things to the revealed will of God; who place religion in an uniform resemblance of the great Object of it; in a steady imitation of him they worship in all his imitable perfections; more

[20] 'Fresh Expressions: About us,' http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/about accessed 10 January 2012.
[21] Martyn Atkins, 'Mission-shaped thinking,' in *Changing Church for a Changing World*, (London: The Methodist Church, 2007).
[22] *Discipleship...and the people called Methodists* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing, 2010). This booklet was widely disseminated and made available by free download from the Methodist Church website.
[23] Ibid., p. 2.
[24] Randy Maddox explains that 'disciple' had connotations in Wesley's day, e.g. adherent, or someone who merely accepts the teachings of a leader, that did not equate with his desire to make 'real' Christians 'fully transformed in Christ's likeness.' See Randy L. Maddox, 'Wesley's Prescription for Making Disciples of Jesus Christ: Insights for the 21st century,' Pulpit and Pew, Duke Divinity School, https://divinity.duke.edu/sites/divinity.duke.edu/files/documents/faculty-maddox/22_Wesleys_Prescription_Duke.pdf accessed 19 March 2019.

> particularly in justice, mercy, and truth, or universal love filling the heart, and governing the life.[25]

This emphasis on holiness is confirmed by Henry Rack, whose meticulous biography of Wesley shows how the pursuit of holiness was key to Wesley's personal vocation and the essence of his movement.[26] It was to this end that Wesley organised his followers into societies, classes and bands where they might grow in holiness, evidenced in lives characterised by love of God and neighbour and finding encouragement, support, and mutual accountability as they pressed on in their common goal toward 'holiness of heart and life.'

It is in the light of this founding tradition, that Methodism's new self-description as 'a discipleship movement shaped for mission' is so striking, if not puzzling, begging the question as to why not 'a holiness movement shaped for mission,' which would reflect more accurately Methodism's 'origins and roots, its heart and soul?' Yet the contemporary Methodist Church has not embraced the language of 'holiness,' whose usage over the course of the twentieth century all but disappeared from Methodist discourse, choosing instead to express the essence of Methodism afresh in terms of 'discipleship.'

1.4 Holiness – Methodism's 'lost' tradition

In reframing Methodist ecclesiology around the concept of 'a discipleship movement shaped for mission,' Atkins' purpose was to set the direction of travel that would

[25] John Wesley, 'Advice to the People called Methodists' (1745), §2, in Rupert E. Davies, ed. *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley, Vol. 9: The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 9:123-4. Henceforth, Wesley, *Works*.
[26] Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1989).

enable the Church to 'turnaround' and meet the mission challenges of our time with renewed focus and vigour.[27] Since 2011, Methodist decision-making, strategy and practice has increasingly rallied around its new strap-line, including the establishment in 2013 of the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network, whose purpose is to provide 'a network of people and pathways…to shape contemporary Methodism as a discipleship movement shaped for mission.'[28]

The favouring of a discipleship discourse is further confirmed by an examination of recent Agendas of the Methodist Conference, setting out the concerns, activities, and reports of the church for consideration and approval. For example, in the 2013 Agenda, there are forty-one references to 'discipleship' but only two references to 'holiness,' only one of which – in the Methodist Missionary Society Report – is contemporaneous.[29] This confirms that an emphasis on holiness features little in the life, work, and mission of today's Methodist Church, leading to the conclusion that it has become a 'lost' tradition and is no longer the language of Methodist discourse.

This is not just a matter of semantics, but also of substance. Whilst there is undoubtedly significant overlap between discipleship and holiness, there is an essential difference: whereas discipleship refers to the process of following and learning the way of Christ, holiness refers to the goal itself, that of becoming Christ-like. Discipleship is the means, holiness the end in view. By favouring the language of discipleship rather than holiness, Methodism is placing the emphasis on the former

[27] Atkins, 'Contemporary Methodism' p. 26.
[28] The Methodist Church, 'Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network Update,' (London: The Methodist Church in Britain, 2013).
[29] *Methodist Conference Agenda 2013*, vol. 1 & 2 (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing, 2013). A not dissimilar pattern may be seen in subsequent Conference Agendas.

rather than the latter, whereas in Wesleyan tradition, the purpose of making disciples is that they should become holy.[30] This was undergirded by John Wesley's doctrine of Christian Perfection, whereby a believer might be so perfected in love that she or he could demonstrate a perfect love of God and neighbour after the pattern of Christ, free from known sins yet not from error or mistakes. Wesley saw Christian perfection as central to the Methodist movement and the raison d'être of its existence:

> This doctrine is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly He appeared to have raised us up.[31]

The doctrine, however, has been contentious since Wesley's day, leading Colin Williams to remark that 'Modern Methodism sometimes has found the doctrine an embarrassment,'[32] and Brian Beck to conclude: 'The structure of Wesley's doctrine of perfection seems to me to be damaged beyond repair. It is no wonder that modern Methodism has not retained it.'[33] Yet this was the goal Wesley set before the Methodist people – a goal that appears to have disappeared from the horizon of Methodist aspiration, as Angela Shier-Jones bluntly states:

> In practice, the personal and corporate discipline that was once characteristic of Methodism's 'methodical' and determined pursuit of holiness is absent. The individual's obligation to serve Christ in the life of the Church and the world is now seldom queried by the Church except in terms of regular attendance at Sunday worship…It would seem that, in spite of its proclamation, the desire to grow in grace and holiness is no longer a characteristic of the Methodist people.[34]

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[30] Walton concurs, stating that 'the currrent conceptualisation of discipleship lacks the holiness orientation or telos of the founding fathers.' See Walton, 'A Discipleship Movement Shaped for Mission'. p. 65.
[31] Cited by Colin Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (London: Epworth Press, 1969), p. 167.
[32] Ibid., footnote.
[33] Brian E. Beck, 'John Wesley and Living Faith: Perfect Love?,' *The Methodist Recorder*, 21 February 1991.
[34] Angela Shier-Jones, *A Work in Progress: Methodists Doing Theology* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2005), p. 251.

William Abraham makes a similar observation from the USA, noting that 'beyond vague platitudes and rhetorical flourishes the doctrine of Christian perfection is no longer operative,' pointedly stating,

> What is at issue is the unravelling of the very core of the tradition… Something has gone seriously wrong at the very heart of Methodist doctrine; if the patient is not already dead, it will take strong medicine to effect a cure.[35]

But if Methodism is reluctant to use the language of holiness and engage in its pursuit, other Christian traditions are less reticent. In September 2011, just a few months after the Methodist Conference embraced the phraseology of discipleship, the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales had no hesitation in bringing holiness to the fore as they marked the first anniversary of Pope Benedict XVI's visit to these islands:

> Following the wonderful example Pope Benedict has given us, in our mission we must be gentle but also confident in manifesting the 'beauty of holiness', a beauty which can lead the heart of every person to an intimate knowledge of Christ… In respect of our mission, our first priority area of work will be: 'To proclaim the universal call to holiness in Christ…'[36]

Four weeks later, Cardinal Vincent Nichols chose as his theme for The Tablet Lecture 2012, 'Holiness today: formation of the human heart,' in which he stressed that 'the call to holiness and the challenge of the new evangelisation…are inseparable,' recalling Pope Benedict's assertion: 'Those who change the world for the better are holy, they

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[35] William J. Abraham, 'Christian Perfection,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, ed. William J. Abraham and James E. Kirby, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 587.

[36] Catholic Bishops' Conference England and Wales, 'Papal Visit Anniversary: Message from the Bishops' Conference,' Catholic Church in England and Wales, http://www.catholic-ew.org.uk/Home/News/2011/Bishops-issue-message-a-year-after-Pope-s-Visit accessed 21 June 2013. In describing 'the universal call to holiness,' as the first priority in mission, the Bishops' Conference was making explicit reference to Vatican II and *Lumen Gentium*, chapter V. Pope Paul VI, 'The Universal Call to Holiness,' The Vatican, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html accessed 04 October 2014.

transform it permanently, instilling in it the energies that only love, inspired by the Gospel, can elicit. The saints are humanity's great benefactors.'[37] Even in the context of the long-standing Catholic tradition of sanctity, Nichols's reference to holiness as 'our fundamental task and concern' and its centrality for Christian mission is striking,[38] especially in its absence from contemporary Methodism, where discipleship not holiness is firmly linked to mission in its new self-description, 'a discipleship movement shaped for mission.'

New stirrings of 'holiness'

There are signs, however, that the language of holiness is not entirely absent from Methodist discourse. It is playing an important role, for example, in ecumenical dialogue, both in Britain and internationally.[39] Most surprising, however, is the role that the early Wesleyan holiness tradition played in the process leading to Methodism's new self-description, as Atkins roots his discussion of Methodist discipleship in the tradition, referring to what he calls 'a holy yearning':

> …a desire bubbling up in Methodism since its beginnings, which shaped and reshapes its life, lifestyle, worship, thinking and action, and is bubbling among us today… Put very simply, Methodists, like many Christian people want – no, deeply desire – to be better disciples of Jesus Christ than they are.[40]

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[37] Cardinal Vincent Nichols, 'Holiness today: formation of the human heart,' The Tablet Publishing Company, http://www.catholicnews.org.uk/Home/News/2011/2011-Tablet-Lecture accessed 14 March 2019.

[38] Ibid.

[39] In relation to the Anglican-Methodist Covenant: 'The Challenge of the Covenant: Uniting in Mission and Holiness - The Second Quinquennial Report (2013) of the Joint Implementation Commission under the Covenant between The Methodist Church of Great Britain And The Church of England,' http://www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/index.htm accessed 06 September 2013. Also, in World Methodist / Roman Catholic dialogue: Joint International Commission for Dialogue Between The World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church, 'The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory,' The World Methodist Council, http://worldmethodistconference.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-Call-to-Holiness-Final-copy-28062016.pdf accessed 26 October 2017.

[40] Atkins, *Discipleship...and the people called Methodists*, p. 6.

Drawing on that tradition, Atkins describes Methodist discipleship as 'whole life,' shaping the whole of our lives not just the 'religious bits,' and 'life-long,' taking 'a lifetime to learn to be a follower of Christ,' because – note the terminology – 'There are no shortcuts to maturity, to holiness.'[41] Similarly, Atkins cites Wesley's belief that Methodists were raised up 'to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land' to illustrate how 'Acts of compassion and devotion, and social transformation have always belonged together in Methodist discipleship.'[42] This suggests that whilst Atkins favours the language of discipleship in the contemporary context, he nonetheless draws on aspects of the early Wesleyan holiness tradition to inform his understanding of Methodist discipleship. This is hardly surprising given that, prior to his appointment as General Secretary, Atkins served as Principal of Cliff College, Derbyshire, the Methodist lay training institution, which historically has been a bastion of the holiness tradition. But, as Roger Walton explains, the impetus was Atkins' reading of 'Vatican II material on the renewal of religious orders' with its encouragement to 'return to the founding intentions or charisms of the founders.'[43]

A repressed gene

The importance that Atkins attached to this method of renewal was demonstrated, on his appointment as General Secretary, by his convening a gathering of Methodist leaders 'to think deeply about what it means to be Methodist, and what it means to express the charisms of the tradition in the twenty-first century.'[44] The outcomes of the 2009 gathering, significantly named *Holiness and Risk,* informed Methodism's new

[41] Ibid., p. 55.
[42] Ibid., p. 38.
[43] Walton, 'A Discipleship Movement Shaped for Mission'. pp. 58-9.
[44] The Methodist Church, 'Holiness and Risk,' http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/vision-values/priorities-for-the-methodist-church/holiness-and-risk accessed 31 July 2013.

self-description. Of particular interest is the presentation by Phillip Meadows, former biochemist and colleague of Atkins at Cliff College, *The DNA of Methodist Discipleship*.[45] In his analysis of the 'Wesleyan genome,' Meadows acknowledges the place of holiness within Methodism's DNA, establishing a clear link between discipleship and holiness, although, like Atkins, he places holiness within the discipleship discourse, which emerges as the dominant theme of the gathering.[46]

In his explanation of how genes function in an organism, Meadows refers to how they 'can be both dominant and recessive…expressed and repressed.'[47] Hence the presence of a particular gene does not mean that it is determinative for an organism's life – it may be repressed, allowing other genes to become dominant. Adopting Meadow's genetic metaphor, therefore, whilst the holiness gene is indeed constitutive of Methodism's historic DNA, it is no longer determinative. It has become a repressed gene, no longer dominant, and notable for its lack of contemporary expression. It is, in other words, a 'lost' tradition, in direct contrast to the Methodist Church's affirmation in the Deed of Union that it 'ever remembers that… [it] was raised up to spread scriptural holiness … and declares its unfaltering resolve to be true to its divinely appointed mission.' Meadows' presentation to the *Holiness and Risk* gathering, therefore, may be viewed as a call to re-engage with that 'lost' holiness tradition so as to better understand the nature of Methodist discipleship.

[45] Philip Meadows, 'The DNA of Methodist Discipleship,' MET (Methodist Evangelicals Together), https://www.methodistevangelicals.org.uk/Articles/523208/The_DNA_of.aspx accessed 05 March 2019.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.

Whilst Meadows' presentation was only one of a number of perspectives on the charisms of Methodism at the *Holiness and Risk* gathering, it is significant that it drew on the early Wesleyan holiness tradition. It is an indication that the tradition is finding traction amongst some in today's Methodist Church. It also confirms that underscoring Methodism's new-found identity as 'a discipleship movement shaped for mission,' there lies the quiet unobtrusive influence of elements of the 'lost' holiness tradition, albeit no longer determinative, dominant, or prominently expressed.

Re-engaging with the holiness tradition

It is against this background that it seems timely for the early Wesleyan holiness tradition to receive renewed attention. A gene that was of foundational importance in the eighteenth century has been repressed and would seem to carry little import in the twenty-first century. How did this happen and why? Why the reticence to give expression to the language of holiness? Is there a problem with the word itself, its connotations, or association with other holiness movements? Or is it a matter of substance and theology, whereby Wesley's views on Christian perfection are viewed as 'damaged beyond repair,' and are quietly yet firmly disregarded? Are we to conclude that this once dominant gene is no longer useful and is destined to remain repressed? Or may we discover that its life-giving properties are far from exhausted and may yet prove beneficial for the health and vitality of contemporary Methodism if their expression were actively cultivated?

But some may rightly ask, why spend time and energy on such a project? Whilst it may be of historical interest to delve into the early Wesleyan holiness tradition, what will be the benefit? If Methodism has felt it necessary to distance itself from that tradition

to meet changing contexts, is not that to be expected with an evolving tradition? And if the discourse of holiness has been found wanting, why haul it back into the strange and secularized world of twenty-first century Britain? Why not let it remain a valued part of Methodist history? These are valid questions. However, this thesis argues that it is precisely because of the challenges that mission and discipleship present to contemporary Methodism and the wider Church that a re-engagement with the early Wesleyan holiness tradition may be all the more relevant and vital. And this is for two reasons.

First, the current missiological challenge and the clear focus on mission in Methodism's new self-description renders the early holiness tradition pertinent to contemporary concerns. It was the pursuit of holiness that energised the mission of John Wesley and the early Methodists. Whilst acknowledging the very different cultural context, it is nonetheless relevant to explore afresh the tradition that informed them, and which may yet have the potential to inform and re-energise their counterparts today, including those from other Christian traditions who share the same serious concern for the future of Christianity in twenty-first century Britain. Secondly, the emphasis on discipleship in Methodism's new self-description begs the question as to how such 'mission-shaped' disciples are to be made and nurtured, thereby raising the matter of Christian formation. Whilst the terminology of Christian formation itself may be new, its practice was no stranger to John Wesley and the early Methodists, who saw the Christian life in terms of growth in holiness and going on to perfection and ordered their communal life accordingly. This is Christian formation Wesleyan style, and is reason enough to warrant a re-engagement with the early Wesleyan holiness tradition given the current importance attached to the formation of disciples. These two

concerns – the missiological challenge and the importance of Christian formation – provide sufficient grounds for a re-engagement. Furthermore, they are themselves directly related: it is the nature and depth of the missiological challenge that makes Christian formation such a key priority, reinforcing the case for the re-engagement with Methodism's 'lost' tradition.

1.5 Christian Formation – A missiological imperative

A changed religious landscape

By the dawn of the twenty-first century, the religious landscape of Britain had changed dramatically from that of a century earlier, presenting challenges to the Christian community unprecedented since Christianity was firmly established as the religion of these islands. A faith so finely woven into the social fabric of the nation had begun to unravel, leading Adrian Hastings to characterize the twentieth century 'as one of a steadily growing separation between Church and society,' that left 'England by the 1990s a decisively, though not stridently, secular society.'[48] His views are supported by the membership figures for UK churches, where in spite of an initial rise from 8.664 million in 1900 to over 10 million by 1925 – a figure maintained until 1940 – the total membership fell to 5.862 million by 2000. And when membership is viewed as a percentage of the overall population, the picture is even starker, with church membership falling unabated from 33% to 12% over the course of the century, setting a pattern of continuing decline.[49] Methodist statistics are even more alarming, with

[48] Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920-2000*, Fourth ed. (London: SCM Press, 2001), pp. xv-xvi.
[49] *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends 2000-2001 No. 2*, ed. Peter Brierley (London: Christian Research, 2001), p. 8.17.

membership falling from 800,000 in 1906 to 180,000 in 2018, the majority of whom 'are retirement age.'[50]

The trauma of two World Wars and the social upheavals they effected, the changes in the cultural and intellectual life of the nation that saw the birth of consumerism, individualism, and multiculturalism together with the growing dominance of the scientific worldview, have all worked to shift the tectonic plates of the religious landscape. And the major seismic shift occurred during the 1960s, according to social and cultural historian, Callum Brown, noting that 'Since then, a formerly religious people have entirely forsaken organised Christianity in a sudden plunge into a truly secular condition.'[51] Whilst allowing that a 'root belief' in God may yet remain, Brown's verdict is brutally frank: '…the culture of Christianity has gone in Britain of the new millennium. Britain is showing the world how religion as we have known it can die.'[52]

The picture of decline portrayed by Brown lends seemingly solid support to the secularization thesis, whereby religion is destined to fade into irrelevance and oblivion in the face of modernity. The secularization thesis, however, has been challenged by one of its former advocates, Peter Berger, who, in 1999, argued that 'The world today, with some exceptions…is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever.'[53] 'Secularization' and 'de-secularization' have thus become competing

[50] 'Methodism in Numbers - Statistics at a Glance,' https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/8617/methodism_in_numbers_2018.pdf accessed 17 September 2018.
[51] Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularization 1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 1.
[52] Ibid., p. 198.
[53] Cited in Luke Bretherton, *Christianity & Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 11.

narratives, with religion understood respectively as either on the wane or in resurgence.

The latest research indicates that the picture is more complex still, with the statistical evidence supporting 'both positions — and neither,' as post-war[54] Britain emerges as both religious and secular.'[55] This is supported by David Goodhew, who cites his own research in York, where, 'since 1980 new congregations have been founded at an average of one per year.'[56] Whilst acknowledging that growth is predominantly among newer churches – independent evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal – Goodhew suggests that the mainline churches that have suffered the greatest decline should take particular encouragement by letting go 'of the secularization theory, its eschatology of decline and its ecclesiology of defeat' and recognise, in contrast to Brown, that there can be 'resurrection as well as death.'[57] Woodhead appears to concur in concluding that 'as the secular ceased to seem like the inevitable destination on a journey all must take, horizons of present vision and future possibility opened up in interesting, but more modest ways.'[58] This resonates with Charles Taylor, who, in tracing the persistence of belief in the transcendent in the midst of vast cultural change, concludes that 'Our age is very far from settling into a comfortable unbelief.'[59]

It would be wrong, however, to underestimate the scale of the shift that has taken place over the course of the twentieth century and equate such 'new forms of

[54] 'Post-war' refers to the period following the Second World War of 1939-45.
[55] Linda Woodhead, 'Introduction,' in *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*, ed. Linda Woodhead and Rebecca Catto, (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 3.
[56] David Goodhew, ed. *Church Growth in Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), p. 3.
[57] Ibid., pp. 256-7.
[58] Woodhead, 'Introduction,' p. 27.
[59] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 727.

transcendence' with Christian faith and practice. In this sense there has been a cultural shift away from creedal Christianity leaving the individual free 'to compose her/his own spiritual experience in a "holistic milieu" of alternative spiritualities, therapies and medicines.'[60] This has been accompanied by a re-framing of the moral landscape with personal ethics increasingly detached from their Christian moorings such that, as Taylor observes, 'masses of people can sense moral sources of a quite different kind, ones that don't necessarily suppose a God.'[61] Dominic Erdozain traces this moral distancing from 'the spirituality that once nourished it'[62] far beyond Brown's 1960s to the mid-Victorian era and to 'a kind of secularised agape: a confident sense that the moral heights of the Christian tradition could be best fulfilled without the barbarities of atonement theology.'[63] What happened in the 1960s was that 'Christianity without the mumbo jumbo' went 'national.'[64] In this sense, Brown is surely right in noting the 'large cultural chasm' that has opened up.[65]

This then is the challenging context that the Methodist and other Christian churches face in twenty-first century Britain. It is challenging because the weakening, if not disappearance, of the 'culture of Christianity' undermines the very platform from which the Christian church has traditionally engaged with society. Instead, the church finds itself in an unfamiliar and destabilising world, struggling to discover how to respond faithfully. Faced with falling numbers, ageing congregations, the closing of

[60] Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2006), p. 13.
[61] Cited in Dominic Erdozain, 'Christianity without the mumbojumbo: the making of a secular outlook in modern Britain' (paper presented at the Responding to Secularism: Christian Witness in a Dogmatic Public Culture, a day conference co-sponsored by the Kirby Laing Institute for Christian Ethics and the Gospel and Our Culture Network, Tyndale House, Cambridge 24 April 2009), p. 7.
[62] Ibid., p. 15.
[63] Ibid., p. 6.
[64] Ibid., p. 15.
[65] Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain*, p. 4.

churches and with no clear pathways to a different future, a narrative of decline becomes hard to resist, notwithstanding instances of growth in some parts of the Church. Anxiety, loss of confidence, uncertainty about the future and low morale are the result. This is reflected in the conclusions of a survey of all Methodist presbyteral ministers at the close of the twentieth century:

> Here are a group of men and women who express great emotional loyalty to the Methodist Church but who are also anxious about the future of the church… Within this context of uncertainty, there is no clear consensus among ministers regarding where solutions really lie.[66]

The missiological question

The sense of anxiety about the identity, purpose, and future of the Methodist Church, revealed by its ministers, points to a deeper underlying concern regarding the unnerving cultural shifts that have taken place – a concern articulated by Lesslie Newbigin[67] when he raised the missiological question: how can the Gospel be made credible for our age? This is the question to be answered in the increasingly complex, diverse and pluralistic world that is contemporary Britain. Newbigin points the way: 'I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the Gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.'[68] Here, Newbigin reminds us of the fundamental importance of the life and witness of the 'believing community.'[69] Called by Christ to share in his mission, there are no quick fixes, easy

[66] John M. Haley and Leslie J. Francis, *British Methodism: What Circuit Ministers Really Think* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2006), pp. 251-2.
[67] Lesslie Newbigin (1909-98), an eminent missiologist, theologian and ecumenist, was a minister of the Church of Scotland who served as a missionary in India for nearly 40 years, helping to establish the ecumenical 'Church of South India,' of which he became bishop. On retirement, Newbigin returned to Britain and was at the forefront in identifying and proposing responses to the new missionary situation facing the British churches, writing extensively on the subject, notably: *The Other Side of 1984* (1983), *Foolishness to the Greeks: Gospel and Western Culture* (1986), and *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (1989).
[68] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (London: SPCK, 1989), p. 227.
[69] Ibid.

options, shortcuts, or smooth pathways – there is only the 'believing community' and the quality and depth of its discipleship:

> It exists in him and for him. He is the centre of its life. Its character is given to it, when it is true to its nature, not by the characters of its members but by his character.[70]

In directing attention to the life and character of the Christian community, Newbigin, by implication, invites us to rediscover the vital importance of Christian formation to the *missio Dei.* In making the link between Christian formation and mission, we find further support from the missiological outworkings of George Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic theology.[71] Answering the question as to how one is to 'preach the gospel in a dechristianized world,' Lindbeck resists the liberal method of translation and suggests that the task of the church is not to 'redescribe' the faith for our time but to teach the language and practices that constitute the Christian faith to would-be adherents, a practice that 'resembles ancient catechesis more than modern translation.'[72] Consequently, Lindbeck's post-liberal theology challenges Christians 'to cultivate their native tongue and learn to act accordingly.'[73] For Lindbeck, like Newbigin, Christian formation and mission appear inseparable.

It is this vital link between Christian formation and contemporary mission, first made through my 'encounter' with David Hill, that has steadily convinced me that mission in twenty-first century Britain will require fresh attention to the Christian formation of all God's people. It is my firm belief that the responsibility for ensuring that 'the one short

[70] Ibid.
[71] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*.
[72] Ibid., p. 132.
[73] Ibid., p. 134.

tale we feel to be true'[74] is known, understood, practised, passed-on, and expressed in the everyday lives of ordinary Christians and would-be followers of Jesus Christ, rests firmly on the Christian community and on its commitment to the Christian formation of the whole people of God. Hence my contention that Christian formation is not an optional extra but a missiological imperative, which, for Methodists, surely demands a serious and intentional re-engagement with their founding tradition.

1.6 Conclusions

In this chapter, we have gone in search of the early Wesleyan holiness tradition by two different routes. First, I shared the personal journey that led me back to it, and second, we considered present-day Methodism, where we found that discipleship is the concept recently chosen to express Methodist identity and calling, with holiness a 'lost' tradition, a 'repressed' gene, no longer determinative or prominently expressed. Reflecting on Britain's changed religious landscape and the challenges posed, I argued that Christian formation is a missiological imperative, and that re-engagement with Methodism's 'lost' tradition is warranted, because it is Christian formation by another name.

Having described my research methodology as a study in practical theology, in which three principal strands of enquiry are brought into critical dialogue – the early Wesleyan holiness tradition, its subsequent interpretation, and the theology and practice of Christian formation – the research will proceed in the following manner. First, we will examine the tradition itself in order to understand it and appreciate its

[74] A phrase of Reynolds Price cited in Andrew Walker, *Telling the Story: Gospel, Mission and Culture* (London: SPCK, 1996), p. 5.

centrality in the life and mission of early Methodism (Chapter 2); second, we will seek to account for its loss by tracing the ways that it has been interpreted and expressed by Wesley's successors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Chapter 3); third, we will explore the tradition's resonance with current perspectives on Christian formation, noting signs of renewed interest, and consider how the Church might engage in retrieval (Chapter 4); finally, we will reflect on the findings of the research and set out some implications for future research and practice.

Though the context may have changed since Wesley's day, the journey to Christ-like, or holy living, remains the same. We begin, therefore, our re-engagement with the early Wesleyan holiness tradition by returning to its beginnings and to John Wesley, who along with his brother, Charles, set holiness as the goal of the Christian life and began the project to 'raise a holy people.'

2 The birth of a tradition

> Our main doctrines, which include all the rest, are three, that of repentance, of faith, and of holiness. The first of these we account, as it were, the porch of religion; the next, the door; the third is religion itself.
>
> John Wesley[75]

The eighteenth-century evangelical revival saw, in Britain, the birth of a movement whose vision of the Christian life was unequivocally expressed in terms of holiness. Central to the movement stands John Wesley, whose Christian experience, catholicity, intellectual gifts, and energy were fully employed in articulating that vision and directing its practical expression in the emerging organisational and communal practices of the early Methodists, such that he is acknowledged to be its leader and founder, albeit that his brother, Charles, played a prominent role. In this chapter, it will be our task to investigate the birth and content of this early Wesleyan holiness tradition in order to provide the necessary framework to understand its subsequent loss and assess its potential for retrieval.

In turning our attention to John Wesley and the early Methodists, we seek to understand the reasons for the emergence of the holiness tradition, the nature of its inner dynamic and theological expression, and its everyday outworking in shaping the life and practice of the early Methodists. We also seek to identify the tensions that the tradition provoked, and the points at which its theology and practice were contested, as these may reflect the challenges the tradition would continue to face, and which may have contributed to its demise.

[75] John Wesley, 'The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained' (1746), VI.4, in *Works*, 9:227.

Our investigations commence with a reflection on Wesley's enduring vision of holiness, identifying key elements of the tradition and its eighteenth-century context. We explore how that vision originated and developed during Wesley's time at Oxford, noting particularly its roots in the virtue tradition and its affectional nature. We consider the significant change of perspective that occurred after Aldersgate in 1738, and its emergence in the early years of the revival, finding expression in the communal practices of the early Methodists and the importance of the means of grace. The contested nature of Wesley's vision of holiness is examined by reference to the perfectionist controversy of the early 1760s. We conclude with a discussion of Wesley's settled views on holiness and Christian perfection, which constitute the early Wesleyan holiness tradition.

2.1 Holiness – an enduring vision

The foundational importance of holiness is clearly evidenced in Wesley's description of Methodism's origins in the 'Large' *Minutes*, the records of the annual conferences he shared with his preachers:

> Q. 4. What may we reasonably believe to be God's design in raising up the preachers called 'Methodists'?
> A. Not to form any new sect: but to reform the nation, and in particular the Church, and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.
> Q. 5. What was the rise of Methodism, so called?
> A. In 1729, two young men, reading the Bible, saw they could not be saved without holiness, followed after it, and incited others so to do. In 1737 they saw holiness comes by faith. They saw likewise, that men are justified before they are sanctified; but still holiness was their point. God then thrust them out, utterly against their will, to raise an holy people.[76]

[76] Wesley, 'Minutes of Several Conversations,' §§4-5, in ibid., 10:875. The phrase 'Not to form any new sect' was added by Wesley in his 1789 revision of the 'Large' *Minutes*. Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), p. 337.

This brief extract provides an insight into key elements of the early Wesleyan holiness tradition as well as indicating some of the subtle changes that it underwent, despite Wesley's claim that his views on Christian perfection had remained unchanged since 1725.[77] Four elements can be identified: (1) the communal nature of Wesleyan holiness; (2) the intrinsic place of holiness in the Wesleyan order of salvation; (3) the teleological dynamic of the Christian life with Christian perfection as the goal; and (4) holiness as the missional purpose of the movement.

First, in locating 'the rise of Methodism' to 1729 and to 'two young men,' who, 'reading the Bible, saw they could not be saved without holiness, followed after it, and incited others so to do,' we note that Wesley refers not to his personal quest, which began in 1725, but to the shared endeavour with Charles and the embryonic gathering of Oxford Methodists. This reflects the communal nature of Wesley's vision of holiness, as something to be sought in the company of others and not a private pursuit. This was robustly articulated in the preface to the 1739 hymn book where Wesley argues against the 'solitary religion' of the mystics, declaring that, 'The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness.'[78] Hence the importance of the communal practices of the early Methodists, especially the bands and classes. They were vital instruments of Christian formation.

Secondly, the inseparable nature of the relationship between holiness and salvation is clearly in evidence, but also apparent are changes in the understanding of that

[77] John Wesley, 'A Plain Account of Christian Perfection' (1766), §27, in Paul Wesley Chilcote and Kenneth J. Collins, eds., *The Bicentennial Edition of The Works of John Wesley, Vol. 13: Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 13:190. Henceforth, Wesley, *Works.*
[78] John Wesley, 'The Preface, Hymns and Sacred Poems' (1739), §5, in Wesley, *Works*, 13:39.

relationship. Initially, we are told that our 'two young men… saw they could not be saved without holiness,' the implication being that they viewed holiness as the precondition for salvation. By 1737, however, there is a change as 'they saw holiness comes by faith,' and is therefore not a precondition but a gift of salvation which accompanies justification – a view prompted by their encounter with the Moravians, especially with Peter Böhler in early 1738. But yet further modification is revealed in the statement, 'They saw, likewise, that men are justified before they are sanctified,' indicating a clear separation of justification and sanctification resulting in the Wesleyan order of salvation, with sanctification consequent upon justification, not a precondition nor an accompanying state, but something yet to be realised. This prompted Outler's reference to the 'elliptical' nature of Wesley's theology: 'Its double foci were the doctrines of justification and sanctification in a special correlation—two aspects of a single gracious intention, but separated along a continuum of both time and experience.'[79]

Thirdly, the essential dynamic of the Christian life is clearly affirmed: 'but still holiness was their point.' Important as repentance and justification may be, they are but the porch and door into the Christian house of holiness – 'the religion itself,' as Wesley vividly remarked.[80] It is this high view of holiness that underwrites Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection, with its teleological vision of the order of salvation. His followers were encouraged to hold the goal or *telos* of Christian living firmly in view and to 'go on to perfection,'[81] and thereby prove the power of God to overcome the

[79] Albert C. Outler, 'Introduction to the Sermons,' in Albert C. Outler, ed. *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley, Vols. 1-4: Sermons* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1984-87), 1:80. Henceforth, Wesley, *Works*.
[80] Wesley, 'The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained' (1746), VI.4, in *Works*, 9:227.
[81] John Wesley, Sermon 76, 'On Perfection' (1784), in ibid., 3:71.

grip of human sin and to enable lives of 'perfect love' towards God and neighbour. Whilst this would be contested, both within and without the movement, it reveals Wesley's inviolable confidence in God's grace. He never wavered from his assertion 'that the great end of religion is to renew our hearts in the image of God,' and, with his therapeutic understanding of salvation, encouraged his followers to '"go on" "from faith to faith", until your whole sickness be healed, and all that "mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus"!'[82]

Finally, we are told that holiness delineates the mission of the Wesley brothers: 'God then thrust them out, utterly against their will, to raise an holy people.' The language suggests that they felt compelled to engage in this challenging mission and that it required of them bold initiatives, such as field preaching, which at first went against the grain and provoked strong and sometimes violent reactions, but which they saw as necessary if they were to be true to their calling. Similarly, reflecting on 'God's design in raising up the Preachers called Methodists,' Wesley is clear that it was 'Not to form any new sect' – for they saw themselves as firmly loyal to the Church of England – but rather, their stated purpose was one of renewal in holiness: 'to reform the nation, and in particular the Church, and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.' Nor was this a matter of piety alone – works of mercy were integral to the Wesleyan vision with sanctification and social action intrinsically linked.[83] This, then, was the purpose to which Wesley committed himself so wholeheartedly, as Richard Heitzenrater remarks, 'Promoting holiness was the practical goal for his every endeavour, the implicit

[82] John Wesley, Sermon 44, 'Original Sin' (1759), III.3, in ibid., 2:185.
[83] See Randy L. Maddox, '"Visit the Poor": John Wesley, the Poor, and the Sanctification of Believers,' in *The Wesleys and the Poor: The Legacy and Development of Methodist Attitudes to Poverty, 1729–1999*, ed. Richard Heitzenrater, (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2002).

purpose of his every activity.'[84] And Wesley expected nothing less of his preachers, who were presented with copies of the 'Large' *Minutes* on their acceptance by Conference,[85] leaving them in no doubt that holiness was indispensable to their calling.

This description of Methodist origins in the 'Large' *Minutes* confirms that holiness was Wesley's distinctive and enduring vision of the Christian life, guiding his long and eventful ministry and one which he constantly set before the Methodist people. It was a vision formed and expressed within Wesley's eighteenth-century world, a period that continues to be misunderstood, particularly in relation to the state of the Church of England and to the nature of the Enlightenment, both of which have been addressed in recent scholarship, providing a richer understanding of Wesley's context.[86]

Wesley in context

It could be argued that Wesley's stated intention 'to reform the nation, and in particular the Church, and to spread scriptural holiness over the land' is partly responsible for the distorted portrayal of the Church of England and religious life in general in a century characterised by Enlightenment ideals. This statement, and other criticisms Wesley made of his times, might suggest that both Church and nation were in urgent need of reform: the former for its laxity, the latter for its neglect of Christianity. Since the nineteenth century this is how the period has generally been viewed, by historians and Methodists alike, with much 'Methodist scholarship

[84] Richard P. Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley: John Wesley his own biographer*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1984), p. 145.
[85] *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, p. 212.
[86] Jeremy Gregory, 'The long eighteenth century,' in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

premised on the given fact of a moribund and ineffective established Church.'[87] 'In this scenario,' as Jeremy Gregory observes, 'Wesley (and Methodism) has been seen as a backlash against the pastoral stagnation of the established Church, as well as a counter-cultural throwback to an age of religious fervour and excitement.'[88] New contextualized research, however, paints a very different picture, correcting such stereotyping in a more positive direction: highlighting the good work of the Church of England without neglecting some of its weaknesses, establishing the continuing importance of religion for the majority of the population as the Enlightenment progressed, and demonstrating that rather than being anti-Enlightenment, Wesley and the Evangelical Revival owed much to Enlightenment thought, even though Wesley remained alert and vehemently opposed to certain aspects, drawn mainly from the French Enlightenment, that in 'separating the love of our neighbour from the love of God' was tantamount to 'thrusting God out of the world he has made.'[89]

The Church of England

In 1934, Norman Sykes began the rehabilitation of the eighteenth-century Church's reputation in *Church and State in England in the Eighteenth Century*.[90] Sykes has been followed by others, including John Walsh and Stephen Taylor who, in their 'Introduction' to an important set of essays, *The Church of England, c. 1869 – c. 1833*,

[87] Ibid., pp. 26, 34. John Walsh and Stephen Taylor, 'Introduction: the Church and Anglicanism in the 'long' eighteenth century,' in *The Church of England c.1689 - c.1833: From Toleration to Tractarianism*, ed. John Walsh, Colin Haydon, and Stephen Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993; reprint, 1995), p. 1. David R. Wilson, 'Anglicanism and Methodism,' in *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume II: Establishment & Empire, 1662-1829*, ed. Jeremy Gregory, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 487-8.
[88] Gregory, 'The long eighteenth century,' p. 26.
[89] John Wesley, Sermon 120, 'The Unity of the Divine Being,' §§19-20, in *Works*, 4:68-9.
[90] Walsh and Taylor, 'Introduction,' p. 2.

argue that, contrary to the Hogarthian and satirical portrayals of clergy as 'lethargic and somnolent,'

> most eighteenth-century clergy saw themselves first and foremost not as priestly mediators between God and man, dispensing the sacraments, but as pastoral educators, spiritual and moral teachers and guides… Christianising the people, through catechizing, through charity and Sunday schools, through private exhortation and, above all, through regular preaching.[91]

Likewise, in a rare study of the religious practice of the laity, *Lay People and Religion in the early Eighteenth Century*, W. M. Jacob finds 'overwhelming' evidence that 'the practice of Christianity according to the formularies of the Church of England was central to most people's lives well beyond the first decade of the eighteenth century,' and that for much of the century 'the parish church and Anglican worship and virtues and morality were largely unquestioned.'

> They were not necessarily saints, but for the great majority of people God was very important, and to be right with God was a determining factor in ordering their own lives and the life of their community.'[92]

Furthermore, "a desire to rediscover and re-establish the order and discipline of the 'primitive' Church'" was present long before Wesley expressed his commitment to the ideal and to the 'reform [of] the Church.'[93] Moreover, in his essay, 'Anglicanism and Methodism,' David Wilson argues that Wesley's 'view of the kind of reform and revival that was possible was shaped not only by history but by contemporary trends,' citing Wesley's 'network of religious societies' as modelling the religious societies established by Anthony Horneck in the 1760s, which Eamon Duffy describes as 'an attempt to translate the ideal of "primitive Christianity" into a practical, above all, an

[91] Ibid., pp. 13-14.
[92] W.M. Jacob, *Lay People and Religion in the early Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 5, 19.
[93] Ibid., p. 227.

[A]nglican reality.'[94] Similarly, the popularity of Robert Nelson's *A Companion for the Festivals and Fasts of the Church of England* (1704), 'commended by churchmen of all stripes,' is yet another example of 'Anglican revitalization efforts in the first half of the eighteenth century,' as Brent Sirota argues, being 'much more a manual for what Nelson calls "holiness of life" than a guidebook to ritual practice,' noting its influence on 'the primitive liturgical solemnities of the Methodist "Holy Club" at Oxford.'[95] In such ways, these scholars situate Wesley within an 'Anglican religious stream' of renewal that was already underway, helping to explain Wesley's 'optimism regarding what could be accomplished within the Church,'[96] as well as to account for the appeal and positive response that Methodism enjoyed in eighteenth-century England.

The nature of the Enlightenment

Similarly, the generally accepted depiction of the eighteenth century as 'the Age of Reason,' ushering in what Methodist historian, Herbert Butterfield, described as 'The Great Secularization' – pitting the English Enlightenment and Christianity in fervent opposition – has been challenged by recent scholars, such as Gregory, reminding us that it was also 'an Age of Faiths'.[97] Ironically, the Evangelical Revival in which Wesley and the early Methodists played such pivotal roles was a phenomenon, though 'not a product,' of the Enlightenment, and far from being opposed to many of its ideals, as David Hempton explains, Wesley and other evangelicals 'absorbed, both consciously

[94] Wilson, 'Anglicanism and Methodism,' pp. 480-81. Also Jacob, *Lay People and Religion*, pp. 227. Horneck was a German priest, heavily influenced by the Pietist, Jakob Spener's small group movement, the Collegia Pietatis, established in 1670 and a forerunner of the Moravian 'bands,' soon to form a vital part of the Methodist story. Kevin M. Watson, *Pursuing Social Holiness: The Band Meeting in Wesley's Thought and Popular Methodist Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 20-22.
[95] Brent S. Sirota, 'Robert Nelson's *Festivals and Fasts* and the Problem of the Sacred in Early Eighteenth-Century England.,' *Church History* 84, no. 3 (2015): pp. 557-8, 67.
[96] Wilson, 'Anglicanism and Methodism,' p. 476.
[97] Jeremy Gregory, 'Introduction: Transforming 'the Age of Reason' into 'an Age of Faiths': or, Putting Religions and Beliefs (Back) into the Eighteenth Century,' *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32, no. 3 (2009). 'The long eighteenth century,' p. 16.

and unconsciously,' some of its characteristic principles and ideas: rationalism, pragmatism, humanitarianism, and optimism.[98]

Though juxtaposed by many, reason and faith went hand in hand for Wesley as his sermons, letters, appeals, and other writings demonstrate. He was a man of 'reason and religion' making his appeal on that basis, confident he would receive a hearing, if not a positive response.[99] Accepting Locke's empirical approach and applying it to matters of faith, Wesley's doctrine of assurance was based on sensible experience: 'the witness of the Spirit.'[100] He was a pragmatist, prepared to experiment to advance the Gospel, as in field preaching and the use of lay preachers.[101] Wesley's humanitarianism was expressed in his personal philanthropy, opposition to slavery, and Methodism's practical concern for the wellbeing and education of the poor.[102] Above all, Wesley's optimism of grace – setting no limit to what God can do – exemplified in his doctrine of Christian perfection, chimed in with Enlightenment optimism. Even Wesley's 'religion of the heart,' a continuing and vital feature of eighteenth-century piety, as John Coffey demonstrates, sat comfortably within Enlightenment individualism and interiority.[103] Indeed, in his fascinating study, *The Evangelical Age of Ingenuity in Industrial Britain* (2016), Joseph Stubenrauch

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[98] David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 7. For an excellent account of the influence of the Enlightenment on the Evangelical Revival, see David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A history from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 50-54.

[99] See, for example, Gerald R. Cragg, ed. *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley, Vol. 11: The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion and Certain Related Open Letters* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1989). Henceforth, Wesley, *Works*.

[100] Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys*, ed. David W. Bebbington and Mark A. Noll, vol. 1, A History of Evangelicalism: People, Movements and Ideas in the English-Speaking World (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 2004). Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 54.

[101] *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 65. Wilson, 'Anglicanism and Methodism,' pp. 482-90.

[102] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, pp. 70-71.

[103] John Coffey, *Heart Religion: Evangelical Piety in England & Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

establishes 'the connection between… the inward world of the heart' and the dramatic outward economic and social changes of the period – 'urbanization, mass production, literacy, mobility, and consumerism' – explaining how evangelicals viewed these as '"means" for salvation [that] could all be directed to the purpose of gospel dispersion,' citing Methodism's success in areas where mobility, industry, and migration provided a fruitful environment for itinerant preaching.[104] As Phyllis Mack concludes in *Heart Religion in the British Empire: Gender and Emotion in Early Methodism* – a study of the lives of ordinary Methodists coping with the 'seismic shift' of the Enlightenment – it was in this context that Wesley's Methodism had 'the power…to convince people of their capacity for moral and spiritual change and their ability to sustain their lifelong efforts at self-transformation, however difficult the discipline and however imperfect the results.'[105]

On the basis of this examination of Wesley's Anglican and Enlightenment context, we may conclude with Gregory that 'Wesley looks less like a reaction to his context, and more like a child of his time.'[106] But where did his enduring vision of holiness originate and how did it inspire and shape Wesley's life? That is the question to which we must now turn.

[104] Joseph Stubenrauch, *The Evangelical Age of Ingenuity in Industrial Britain* (Oxford: Oxford Universtiy Press, 2016), pp. 3-4, 13, 18-19.
[105] Phyllis Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Empire: Gender and Emotion in Early Methodism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 8, 28.
[106] Gregory, 'The long eighteenth century,' p. 22.

2.2 An emerging tradition: John Wesley and the pursuit of holiness

Whenever Wesley reflects on his Christian journey, as he does in his various retrospective accounts, he invariably begins by expressing his indebtedness to others. This is highly significant because it reminds us that Wesley was part of a wider Christian tradition, from whose many streams he drank, as if with an unquenchable thirst. He was not 'self-made,' but a gifted explorer and expositor of the inexhaustible wealth of the Christian tradition, which proved to be so influential in his spiritual and theological formation and the development of early Methodism. Wesley did not see himself or his movement as offering 'a new religion' but on the contrary, staunchly asserted that 'Methodism, so called, is the old religion, the religion of the Bible, the religion of the primitive Church, the religion of the Church of England.'[107] His originality lay, as Jean Orcibal observes, in his 'ability to select and assimilate rather than to create…[which] becomes all the more striking, paradoxically, as the variety and breadth of his sources are revealed.'[108] This is nowhere more evident than in his appropriation of holiness as the essence of Christian life, where an examination of his sources and spiritual context demonstrate how Wesley drew from Anglican, Puritan, Roman Catholic, mystic, early church, and Moravian spiritual streams, and, of course the Bible, in arriving at his own distinctive vision – the early Wesleyan holiness tradition.[109]

[107] John Wesley, Sermon 112, 'On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel' (1777), II.1, in *Works*, 3:585.
[108] Jean Orcibal, 'The Theological Originality of John Wesley and Continental Spirituality,' in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp, 1, (London: Epworth Press, 1965), p. 110.
[109] For an excellent summary of these sources, see Paul W. Chilcote's 'Introduction to Wesley's Treatises on Christian Perfection,' in Wesley, *Works*, 13:6-15.

John Wesley and his sources

It all began during his formative years in the rich atmosphere of High Church Anglican piety, devotion, and practice that his parents, Susanna and Samuel, rector of Epworth in Lincolnshire, provided for their family,[110] and from which, as Martin Schmidt observes, 'one leading theme resounds like a *cantus firmus*:'

> …that of the love of God which empowers man towards perfection. It might be said that here, in the cradle, the main content of John Wesley's thought was already being proclaimed.[111]

It was not until 1725, at Oxford, however, that the undoubted influence of his Epworth home properly surfaced when Wesley's desire for holiness was abruptly awakened by reading the works of exponents of the 'holy living' tradition, three of whom, by his own account, were responsible for instituting a marked change in his spirituality and practice: Jeremy Taylor, Thomas à Kempis, and William Law.[112]

In 'A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,' Wesley recounts being 'exceedingly affected' in 1725 reading Taylor's *Rule and Exercises of Holy Living and Dying*, particularly, its emphasis on 'purity of intention,' and instantly 'resolved to dedicate *all my life* to God.'[113] Following Taylor's advice, Wesley, kept a diary to monitor his progress in holy living,[114] embracing the practices that, as Chilcote remarks, 'would be his constant companions through life: namely, study of the Bible, frequent

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[110] Samuel and Susanna's formation took place within both Puritan and Anglican traditions, being children of Dissenting ministers, ejected from their livings in 1662, who 'joined the Church of England while still young.' See Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, pp. 46-7.
[111] Cited in D. Michael Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley's Class Meeting* (Nappanee, IN: Francis Asbury Press, 1997), p. 40.
[112] Wesley, 'Plain Account,' §§2-5, in *Works*, 13:136-38.
[113] Ibid., §2, 13:136.
[114] John Wesley, 'An Extract of the Rev. Mr. John Wesley's Journal,' in W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley, Vols. 18-24: Journals and Diaries* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988-2003), 18:121. Henceforth, Wesley, *Works*.

Communion, disciplined private prayer and public worship, and a general rule of life for the formation of Christian character.'[115]

Reading à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* had the added impact of impressing upon Wesley that being a Christian was much more than outward performance and Christian practices – it was an inward reality, a matter of the heart, that is, of the affections.

> The nature and extent of *inward religion*, the religion of the heart, now appeared to me in a stronger light than ever it had done before. I saw, that giving even *all my life* to God (supposing it possible to do this, and go no farther) would profit me nothing, unless I gave *my heart*, yea *all my heart*, to Him. I saw that 'simplicity of intention, and purity of affection,' *one design* in *all* we speak or do, and *one desire* ruling all our tempers, are indeed 'the wings of the soul,' without which she can never ascend to the mount of God.[116]

This realisation, 'that true religion was seated in the heart,' which Wesley further attributes to à Kempis in his retrospective *Journal* entry for 24 May 1738, set him 'in earnest upon *a new life,*' aiming and praying 'for inward holiness.'[117] In this he was in accord with pietistic heart religion, which, though controversial, 'drew deeply on ancient, medieval and post-Reformation sources,' and which, as Coffey asserts, was even 'demanded' by the Book of Common Prayer: "God 'unto whom all hearts be open… incline our hearts to keepe [thy] law'."[118] It was with this combination of single-minded commitment and inward devotion – 'simplicity of intention, and purity of affection' – acquired from Taylor and à Kempis, that Wesley prepared for ordination in the Church of England.[119]

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[115] See Chilcote, 'Introduction,' in Wesley, *Works*, 13:10-11.
[116] Wesley refers to it as *The Christian's Pattern*. Ibid., §3, 13:137.
[117] John Wesley, *Journal* (May 24, 1738), §4, in ibid., 18:243-44.
[118] Coffey, *Heart Religion*, pp. 5-9.
[119] *Works*, 18:244.

In Law, Wesley found a contemporary role model for holy living within the Church of England. Law's outstanding works of spiritual devotion, *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection* (1726) and *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1729), consolidated and developed Wesley's understanding of holiness, convincing him 'of the absolute impossibility of being *half a Christian*.'[120] In *Serious Call*, Law denounces Christians who attend worship yet live as everyone else, calling instead for Christ-like living in all our everyday actions and behaviours.[121] Likewise, in *Christian Perfection,* he devotes a chapter to the assertion that, 'All Christians are required to imitate the Life and Example of Jesus Christ,' explaining that, 'We are to be like him in heart and mind, to act by the same rule, to look towards the same end, and to govern our lives by the same spirit.'[122] Wesley concurred, finding this same emphasis on conformity to Christ in the Bible:

> Hence I saw, in a clearer and clearer light, the indispensable necessity of having 'the mind which was in Christ', and of 'walking as Christ also walks'; even of having, not *some part* only, but *all* the mind which was in him, and of walking as he walked, not only in *many*, or in *most* respects, but in *all* things. And this was the light wherein at this time I generally considered religion, as an *uniform* following of Christ, an *entire* inward and outward conformity to our Master.[123]

Wesley's indebtedness to Law may also be discerned in the vital role Law ascribes to the Holy Spirit and new birth in the journey to perfection:

> Our whole nature must be changed; we must have put off the old man; we must be born again of God, we must have overcome the world, we

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[120] Wesley read *A Serious Call* in 1730 and *Christian Perfection* 'a year or so later.' Wesley, 'Plain Account,' §4, and footnote 7, in ibid., 13:137. Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, and John Fletcher were similarly affected by Law, the reclusive and high church Nonjuror, who thus unwittingly helped shape the evangelical revival. See David Lyle Jeffrey, ed. *English Spirituality in the Age of Wesley* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), p. 28. Charles Wesley referred to Law as 'our John the Baptist,' stating that 'All that I knew of religion I learned from him.' Gary Best, *Charles Wesley: A Biography* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2006), p. 38.
[121] Jeffrey, *English Spirituality*, p. 144.
[122] Ibid., p. 122.
[123] Wesley, 'Plain Account,' §5, in *Works*, 13:137.

> must live by faith, be full of the Spirit of Christ, in order to exercise this love.[124]

Yet, for all Law's insistence that perfection must remain the ambition of every Christian, he offered no assurance to those who sought after it other than 'the sincerity' of their endeavours, for 'it cannot be proved that God has any terms of favour for those who do not labour to be as perfect as they can be.'[125] This view was shared by most 'high churchmen,' [who] tended to see holy living as the path to regeneration and final justification before God.'[126] Wesley accepted this for several years, believing 'that our hope is sincerity, not perfection; not to do well, but to do our best.'[127] However, without a measure of what constitutes 'our best,' he would remain anxious, desiring a level of assurance that would only be resolved at Aldersgate.

Taken together, Taylor, à Kempis, and Law framed the context for Wesley's pursuit of holiness, delineating the key parameters of the Wesleyan formational model: Christian practices and a simple rule of life (Taylor), the religion of the heart (à Kempis), and Christ-like living with Christian perfection as the goal for every Christian (Law).[128] Their combined influence demonstrates how Wesley's concern for holiness and perfection was not something conjured up and peculiar to him, but belonged to the spiritual atmosphere of his times.[129] As already noted, Wesley imbibed and was deeply

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[124] Jeffrey, *English Spirituality*, pp. 131-2.
[125] Ibid., p. 131.
[126] Coffey, *Heart Religion*, p. 15.
[127] John Wesley, 'Letter to Ann Granville' (October 3, 1731), in Frank Baker, ed. *The Works of John Wesley, Vol. 25: Letters I, 1721-1739* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 25:318. Henceforth, Wesley, *Works*.
[128] Wesley later variously selected, abridged, and published their work, for the benefit of the Methodist people. See Chilcote, 'Introduction,' and footnotes 39, 44, in *Works*, 13:10-12.
[129] This accords with Coffey's summary of recent scholarship that pushes 'back the origins of the Evangelical Revival [reconnecting] it with religious renewal in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries,' rehabilitating 'the Church of England in the decades before the Evangelical Revival.' Coffey, *Heart Religion*, p. 19. See also, William H. Shontz, 'Anglican Influence on John Wesley's Soteriology,'

affected by a Christian tradition, mediated particularly through the Church of England and its High Church exponents, that had sufficient vitality and vigour to refocus his life and energies around a determined and disciplined quest for holy living, following a path that others had set. At first, it was a solitary quest, but when in early 1729, his brother, Charles, began to take his Christian faith more seriously, turned to John for advice, and was joined by a friend, the seeds were sown for a shared enterprise.[130] Returning to Oxford, following a curacy at Epworth, Wesley's pursuit of holiness would now take place within community. He would quickly grasp its value.

The Oxford Methodists and 'social holiness'

Wesley's reference to the time when 'four of us met together at Oxford,' in November 1729, as 'the first rise of Methodism' signals the importance he attached to communal formation in holiness, as he experienced it there.[131] Though the leader of what became a network of young men meeting in small groups across Oxford, the benefits were mutual. The meetings quickly became, as Heitzenrater notes, 'a corporate and public expression of the "method" begun by John five years earlier.'[132] They also resembled Horneck's Religious Societies, designed to promote 'holiness of heart and life,' which John and Charles had encountered at Epworth where their father had established a society.[133] They differed, however, in the frequency of the Oxford meetings – several times a week, as opposed to weekly – and the growing emphasis on

Wesleyan Theological Journal 32, no. 1, Spring (1997). 'Far from being an innovator within Protestantism with his teaching of Christian perfection, John Wesley was the heir of a theological tradition firmly established in the Church of England.' Ibid., p. 37.

[130] The friend is probably William Morgan, though may be Robert Kirkham. Richard P. Heitzenrater, 'The Founding Brothers,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, ed. William Abraham and James E. Kirby, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 32-3.

[131] John Wesley, 'A Short History of the People Called Methodists' (1781), §9, in *Works*, 9:430.

[132] Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory: Reflections on Early Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1989), p. 73.

[133] Watson, *Pursuing Social Holiness*, pp. 17-23.

mutual confession and holding one another accountable, something that became a feature of the later Methodist bands.[134]

Two members of the group, William Morgan and John Clayton, particularly influenced Wesley. Morgan's visit to a condemned murderer in Oxford Castle prison in early August 1730 was to have far-reaching effects, resulting in Wesley's lifelong practical concern for prisoners, and the poor in general. Initially cautious when asked by Morgan to join him, Wesley consulted his father, and obtained the permission of the bishop of Oxford before embarking upon a practice that proved both formative for Wesley and for Methodism. Henceforth, 'works of mercy' and 'works of piety' would be inseparable in the Wesleyan vision of holiness.

Though only a member for a short time, John Clayton was influential on several fronts. The son of a Manchester bookseller, Clayton introduced Wesley to publishers, paving the way in 1733 for the first of Wesley's many publications that would both defend and spread the Wesleyan vision as well as educate the early Methodists.[135] It was through Clayton's connections that John became a "corresponding member" of SPCK, eventually leading to his decision to go to Georgia in 1735.[136] Above all, Clayton introduced Wesley to the works of the Manchester Nonjurors with their emphasis on the 'Primitive' or early church, thereby encouraging Wesley and the Oxford Methodists to adopt the 'Stationary fasts' on Wednesdays and Fridays, as 'commended to Wesley' in reading Robert Nelson's *Festivals and Fasts*.[137] And it was in the early church that

[134] Ibid., pp. 30-31.
[135] Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, p. 44.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid. Albert C. Outler, ed. *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 62. Sirota, 'Festivals and Fasts,' p. 558.

Wesley found an ideal of Christian community and practice that he found inspirational, as he began to study their writings with Clayton.[138] He was particularly drawn to "Macarius the Egyptian" and Ephraem Syrus, with their description of perfection as a process rather than a static state, as well as to Clement of Alexandria's 'Christian Gnostic,' who later served as Wesley's model for the ideal Christian.[139] This Eastern perspective accorded well with Wesley's disciplined pursuit of perfection. Macarius, for example, wrote, 'It is only gradually that a man grows and comes to *a perfect man, to the measure of the stature*, not, as some say, "Off with one coat and on with another."'[140] Whilst, after Aldersgate, Wesley would advocate the possibility of its instantaneous reception, it remained within the context of ongoing gradual growth.

The influence of Morgan and Clayton demonstrate how the Oxford Methodists provided Wesley with an experience of God's grace at work within the close fellowship and shared practice of a mutually supportive group engaged in the common pursuit of holiness of heart and life – something he would not forget, and from which the communal practices of the early Methodists developed. Yet if we are to fully comprehend how Wesley and his companions engaged in their shared quest we must look beyond what Heitzenrater summarizes as the three main areas of their activity – 'study, devotion, charity'[141] – to the practice of meditation and the development of Christ-like virtues that undergirded them.[142]

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[138] Outler, *John Wesley*, p. 9. For a detailed account of Wesley's commitment to the ideal of the primitive church, see, Geordan Hammond, *John Wesley in America: Restoring Primitive Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
[139] Macarius was not Egyptian, but 'a fifth-century Syrian monk,' heavily indebted to Gregory of Nyssa for his ideas on perfection. Outler, *John Wesley*, pp. 9-10. Outler's work has led to an interest in the similarities between Wesley and the Orthodox Church, particularly the doctrine of theosis.
[140] R. Newton Flew, *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology: An historical study of the Christian ideal for the present life* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 183.
[141] Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory*, p. 86.
[142] Heitzenrater, 'The Founding Brothers,' p. 33.

Holiness and Virtue

The decoding of Wesley's Oxford diaries by Richard Heitzenrater provides an important insight into the spiritual practices of the Oxford Methodists,[143] revealing how their pursuit of holiness was rooted in the ancient and medieval tradition of the virtues which guided Western life and thought from Aristotle and Augustine to its defining expression in Aquinas. The virtue tradition provided the intellectual and moral background that informed medieval piety and those in the holy living tradition, who were of such formational importance to Wesley and the Oxford Methodists. It provided the overarching worldview that envisioned moral excellence as the development of Christian virtue, as Heitzenrater explains:

> Perfection must be understood in the context of a virtue-oriented ethic. The desired end is not perfect obedience to a standard of conduct; it is perfect conformity to a model of divine-oriented virtue. Being restored in the image of God is basic to the whole process. The goal is not to be able to act perfectly; the goal is to be perfect, to achieve an inward perfection of intentions and attitudes, of will as well as of understanding. Truly good actions are the result of inward dispositions of the soul (virtues) – thankfulness, meekness, humility, self-denial, mortification, chastity, love of neighbour, and (the ground of them all) love of God. The Christian life involves a life of devotion that will cultivate these virtues (the imitation of Christ) as well as contend with "the world, the flesh, and the devil" (the spiritual combat). The means by which this double-edged form of spirituality could be effected in the life of the believer was the practice of meditation.[144]

The Oxford Methodists devoted an hour each day to meditation, something the Wesley brothers had learnt from their mother, in order to develop Christian virtue.[145] They employed probing questions as a means of self-examination, and reflected each day on specific Christ-like virtues in their desire to 'to ferret out specific sins and to plant in their place the corresponding virtue.'[146] In their efforts, Wesley and his friends

[143] See Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory*, pp. 78-105.
[144] Ibid., p. 100.
[145] Ibid., p. 90.
[146] Ibid., pp. 90-91.

were not 'trying to earn salvation by doing good work,' but on the contrary, as Heitzenrater explains, they were 'allowing God's grace to help them become like Christ, filling them with Christlike virtues that would free them from sinfulness and allow them to have the mind of their Saviour and walk as he walked (Phil 2.15).'[147]

The foundational importance of the virtue tradition in Wesley's pursuit of holiness makes a vital contribution to the argument of this thesis, helping to explain both the later demise of the early Wesleyan holiness tradition as well as offering grounds for its recovery. This is because Wesley is often perceived through the lens of the Enlightenment which turned its back on that earlier tradition.[148] But if we are to understand him aright, it is crucial that we recognize that Wesley's vision of holiness was forged within the passing world of medieval piety, with its emphasis on virtue, yet set amidst the birth-pangs of the Enlightenment, with its stress on reason. Wesley straddled both worlds. With his immense intellect and rational capabilities, Wesley was ideally suited to advancing the Christian faith within the new brave world of reason,[149] yet his aspirations towards holiness owed their motivational force to that older tradition of the virtues where God and goodness were inseparably joined rather than to the new world of autonomous reason, where ethics emerges, set free, as it were, from reference to God, as D. Stephen Long remarks:

> Wesley remained indebted to a medieval, dogmatic, sacramental world where the moral life depended upon friendship with God and was

[147] Heitzenrater, 'The Founding Brothers,' p. 33.
[148] See, for example, D. Stephen Long, who notes 'the tendency of Wesleyan theologians to read Wesley in terms of Lockean empiricism [which] has misled us from seeing how his work continues the medieval and Anglican sacramental world that assumed the ancient metaphysics of participation. Our end is happiness and holiness.' D. Stephen Long, *John Wesley's Moral Theology: The Quest for God and Goodness* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2005), p. 13.
[149] See, for example, John Wesley, 'The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion' (1743-47), in *Works*, 9:45-325.

> fundamentally oriented by the church. His world was more like Thomas Aquinas than ours.[150]

Like Aquinas, Wesley's Christian vision is teleological, centred in the virtues, and concerned with renewal in the image of God. This explains the inextricable link between holiness and happiness that we find 'in no less than thirty of his sermons,' where, as Outler records, Wesley 'rings the changes on the theme: only the holy can ever be truly happy.'[151] Two such early sermons present us with the opportunity to consider the vital role of the affections in Wesley's understanding of holiness. For as with the virtues, the affections make a vital contribution to my argument.

Holiness and Affection

Central to Wesley's theological anthropology, and governing his therapeutic view of salvation, was renewal in the image of God. This is evident from his first university sermon, 'The Image of God,' preached at St Mary's, Oxford, in November 1730.[152] In the sermon, Wesley considers how the image of God, in whose moral likeness we are created, may be recovered in the light of its loss.[153] Providing the conceptual framework for the sermon are the three faculties that Wesley maintains comprise the divine moral image: 'understanding, will, and liberty.'[154] Originally endowed with 'an unerring understanding' (to distinguish 'truth from falsehood'), 'a perfect will governed by one affection' ('Every movement of his heart was love'), and 'perfect

[150] Long, *John Wesley's Moral Theology*, p. xix.
[151] Outler, 'Introduction,' footnote 28, in *Works*, 1:35. Happiness is not to be equated with modern secular notions, but to be understood in the tradition of Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas where happiness is the blessedness of 'knowing, loving, and enjoying God, and loving self and others in pursuit of that goal.' See, for example, Ellen T. Charry, *God and the Art of Happiness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), pp. 57, 109.
[152] John Wesley, Sermon 141, 'The Image of God' (1730), in *Works*, 4:290-303.
[153] Ibid., §5, 4:293.
[154] See Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, Tennessee: Kingswood Books, 1994), p. 69.

freedom' (to choose for oneself), humankind enjoyed perfect happiness.[155] These became flawed through Adam's disobedience, resulting in a 'depraved understanding' (mistaking 'falsehood for truth and truth for falsehood'), 'a corrupted will' (no longer governed by one affection but 'seized by legions of vile affections'), 'Liberty' subdued (the 'slave of vice' not virtue), and happiness replaced by '[un]sought-for misery.'[156] The remedy is God's provision in Christ of renewal in the divine image. The 'first step' of which is humility: acknowledging our condition so that the process of re-focussing the will and wayward affections on God alone may begin.[157] In this way, Wesley explains, we are restored 'first to knowledge [understanding], and then to virtue [the will governed by love, the affection that is the highest Christian virtue], and freedom [liberty], and happiness [holiness].'[158]

This sermon reveals Wesley's affectional understanding of formation in holiness, envisaged as a necessary change in our affections, directing our hearts away from other desires toward a perfect love of God. It highlights the accompanying role of the virtues in this therapeutic process, the virtues being, as Hauerwas and Long remark, the 'habits that form our passions and direct our desires and actions towards their true end: the goodness of God.'[159] The study and meditation of Christ-like virtue, the rules by which they held one another to account, the keeping of private journals, the works

[155] Wesley, 'The Image of God,' I.1-4, in *Works*, 4:293-95.
[156] Ibid., II.1-5, 4:295-99. Wesley is drawing on the understanding 'Of Original or Birth-sin' in Article IX of the Articles of Religion which describes original sin as 'the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man… whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit... And this infection of the nature doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated;' *The Book of Common Prayer*, Enlarged Edition ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 615.
[157] Wesley, 'The Image of God,' III.1-2, in *Works*, 4:299-300.
[158] Ibid., 1.3, 4:300.
[159] D. Stephen Long and Stanley Hauerwas, 'Theological Ethics,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, ed. William J. Abraham and James E. Kirby, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 639.

of piety and mercy, were the means by which Wesley and the Oxford Methodists sought to effect such inward change, through the workings of God's grace. It was indeed a matter of the heart, as Wesley first discovered on reading à Kempis, where "heart," as Randy Maddox states, 'refers to our inner motivating inclinations.'[160] It is, therefore, to the "heart" and the necessary change in these motivating inclinations, that Wesley turned his attention on New Year's Day, 1733, when, on the Feast of the Circumcision, he preached what Albert Outler describes as a 'landmark sermon,' in which he gave one of the 'most careful and complete statements of his doctrine of holiness.'[161]

'The Circumcision of the Heart' is a clarion call for radical renewal through the pursuit of holiness, addressed to a prevailing Christian culture that Wesley believes has *'lived away* the substance' of the religion by following 'the spirit of the world' rather than 'the Spirit of Christ.'[162] To that end, Wesley employs his text, Romans 2:29, 'Circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter,' to assert that 'the distinguishing mark of a true follower of Christ…is not either outward circumcision or baptism, or any other outward form, but a right state of soul – a mind and spirit renewed after the image of him that created it.'[163] In other words, it is an inward reality:

> …it is that habitual disposition of soul which in the Sacred Writings is termed 'holiness', and which directly implies the being cleansed from sin, 'from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit', and by consequence the being endued with those virtues which were also in Christ Jesus, the being so

[160] Randy L. Maddox, 'A Change of Affections: The Development, Dynamics, and Dethronement of John Wesley's "Heart Religion",' in *"Heart Religion" in the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements*, ed. Richard Steele, Pietist and Wesleyan Studies, 12 (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press), p. 16.
[161] Albert C. Outler, 'The Circumcision of the Heart: An Introductory Comment,' in *Works*, 1:398.
[162] John Wesley, Sermon 17, 'The Circumcision of the Heart' (1733), in ibid., 1:398-414.
[163] Ibid., §3, 1:402.

> 'renewed in the image of our mind' as to be 'perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect.'[164]

This early definition of Christian Perfection, which Wesley continued to affirm,[165] is important because it confirms how Wesley's moral psychology was focussed on the attainment of that 'habitual disposition of the soul' that overcomes our predilection to sin through the development of Christ-like virtues, principal among which are faith, hope, and love, issuing in perfect love of God and neighbour. Wesley's advice is clear, 'Let every affection, and thought, and word, and work, be subordinate to this,' and '[H]ave no end, no ultimate end, but God.'[166] Here all that Wesley has learned from Taylor, à Kempis, Law, the early church, and his Oxford companions come together to establish virtue and affection as inseparable in his understanding of formation in holiness.

Yet for all his eloquence, Wesley struggled to find the assurance to accompany his intellectual understanding. A change of perspective was required before Wesley would emerge with not only that much-sought assurance, but also with a renewed understanding of the role of the affections in the dynamics of holiness.

2.3 A changing tradition: the 'warmed heart'

The circumstances surrounding John Wesley's Aldersgate experience on 24 May 1738 prompted a step-change in his vision of holiness, transcending the influences that had initially inspired him, and propelling Wesley and his emerging movement into new theological, spiritual, and experiential realms. Whilst there continues to be debate

[164] Ibid., I.1., 1:402-3.
[165] See, Wesley, 'Plain Account,' §6, in ibid., 13:139.
[166] Wesley, 'The Circumcision of the Heart,' in ibid., 1.12-13, 1:408.

about whether 'conversion' is an appropriate description for Wesley's experience at Aldersgate,[167] there can be little doubt that had it not been for Aldersgate, the early Wesleyan holiness tradition would not have emerged with the vitality and distinctiveness that characterised its expression in the life of Wesley and his movement. And just as we misunderstand Wesley's Aldersgate experience if we do not take account of what may be termed his 'medieval and sacramental heritage,' we similarly fail to appreciate the role of that heritage if we assume it was unchanged for him by Aldersgate. For what began as the gradual pursuit of holiness through the development of Christ-like virtue, would, as a consequence of Aldersgate, embrace the possibility of its instantaneous achievement, albeit within the context of ongoing growth.

John Wesley and the Moravians

Though Aldersgate provided the decisive change of perspective that gave birth to the early Wesleyan holiness tradition, it was the Moravians – a small community of German pietists who had settled on the estate of Count Zinzendorf in Hernnhut, Saxony – who acted as midwives, accompanying and encouraging Wesley through the long and difficult delivery, only to part company as the infant Wesleyan tradition took its first steps of independence.

Wesley first encountered the Moravians in October 1735 on board *The Simmonds* as he sailed, with his brother, Charles, to the newly established colony of Georgia.

[167] The years 1738 and 1725 are variously looked to as the instance of Wesley's conversion, see Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 153. See also Sarah H. Lancaster, 'Current debates over Wesley's legacy among his progeny,' in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 304-6.

Wesley was impressed by the Moravians, both on the voyage, where he was struck by their assurance in a terrifying Atlantic storm,[168] and in Savannah where he often worshipped with them.[169] His relationship continued on his return to England in early 1738, his ministry cut short by grievances against him that also left him questioning his faith. 'I who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God,' he wrote in his *Journal*, describing 'The faith I want' as:

> 'a sure trust and confidence in God, that through the merits of Christ, my sins are forgiven, and I reconciled to the favour of God'… For whosoever hath it is 'freed from sin'; 'the whole body of sin is destroyed' in him.[170]

Heitzenrater observes how this entry betrays the influence of Peter Böhler, a Moravian pastor on his way to America, whom Wesley met on 7 February 1738 and who guided his 'journey' to Aldersgate. Under Böhler's direction, Wesley came to accept that salvation is by faith alone, that such faith is given in a moment, that there are no degrees of faith – you either have faith or you do not – and that this faith is accompanied by an unmistakeable assurance and freedom from sin.[171] The outcome was Wesley's Aldersgate experience of 24 May 1738, when he felt his heart 'strangely warmed.'[172] Yet Aldersgate did not correspond with all that Wesley had been promised, particularly the anticipated 'freedom from sin.' This undermined Wesley's sense of assurance, experienced at Aldersgate, which was only relieved after he witnessed the effects of his field-preaching at Bristol, beginning on 2 April 1739.[173]

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[168] Such was the impression that the Moravians made on him, that Wesley recorded, 'This was the most glorious day which I have ever seen.' Journal (Jan 17., 1736), in *Works*, 18:143.
[169] For a detailed account, see, Hammond, *John Wesley in America*, pp. 79-107.
[170] Journal (February 1, 1738), in *Works*, 18:214-16.
[171] Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory*, p. 146.
[172] Wesley, *Journal* (May 24, 1738), §14, in *Works*, 18:249-50.
[173] 'Field preaching' describes the outdoor preaching for which Wesley and the early Methodists were renowned. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, p. 99.

The key to understanding Wesley's unsettled state, is not to play down Aldersgate's significance, but to view it in the context of his desire for perfection. At Aldersgate, he not only wanted faith, he wanted to be holy. He had, in truth, expected too much, seduced by the idea that justification would bring sanctification. The fact that it did not created his dilemma. As Heitzenrater explains, 'Böhler and the English Moravians, had, in Lutheran fashion, collapsed sanctification into justification and, in Pietist fashion, extended forgiveness of sins (imputed righteousness) into freedom from sin (infused righteousness).'[174] This would not do for Wesley – being regarded as righteous was not sufficient. With his therapeutic understanding of salvation, as renewal in the image of God, he would hold on to the promise and possibility of perfection – and also, as an Arminian, of its loss. This brought him into conflict with Moravians and Calvinists alike, but helped forge his distinctive vision of the Christian life, whereby justification becomes the 'door' to holiness. Hence the duality in Wesley's approach: the believer is both a Christian (through justification and new birth) and at the same time becoming a Christian (through sanctification, the consequence of justification and new birth). 'This shifted,' as Rack remarks, 'the traditional Reformation emphasis on the all-importance of justification and the 'evangelical' emphasis on the moment of conversion towards progress in sanctification,'[175] the significance of which is not lost on Kenneth Collins:

> It is easy for us to miss the originality of this Wesleyan view of faith alone and holy living held together. Here was a great evangelist preaching up *sola fide* and, at the very same time, teaching his converts to go on to perfection and to expect it in this life! His critics were quick to notice this strange move and to seize upon it as proof of Wesley's inconsistency. Actually, it was yet another of Wesley's "third alternatives" – maybe his most original one.[176]

[174] Ibid., p. 83.
[175] Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 156.
[176] Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), p. 4.

Whilst Aldersgate had not brought the holiness he anticipated, it certainly gave Wesley a new grasp of the nature of faith, which would have major repercussions for his understanding of holiness, so much so, that in 1748, Wesley made an addition to his sermon, 'The Circumcision of the Heart,' reflecting his changed view. In the original, Wesley had described 'faith' as, 'an unshaken assent to all that God hath revealed in Scripture…'[177] but after Aldersgate, Wesley adds, 'likewise [faith is] the revelation of Christ in our hearts: a divine evidence or conviction of his love, his free, unmerited love to me a sinner; a sure confidence in his pardoning mercy, wrought in us by the Holy Ghost.'[178] Faith had become intensely personal – 'the revelation of Christ in our hearts.' The resulting experiential nature of Wesley's newfound faith led to a pivotal change in his understanding of the affections and the dynamics of holiness.

'A Change of Affections'[179]

When Wesley 'felt' his heart 'strangely warmed' at Aldersgate, it prompted an inversion in the role he ascribed to the affections in his understanding of holiness. Whereas previously Wesley believed that holiness is achieved by directing our disordered affections towards God and neighbour through rational control and habit-forming Christian practices, Aldersgate convinced him that holiness issues from knowing and being *affected* by God's reconciling love for us, which becomes the motivational and enabling power for holy living and participation in such practices. According to Maddox, this change in Wesley's moral psychology – the 'dynamics involved in moral choice and action'[180] – saw Wesley abandon 'his received

[177] Wesley, 'The Circumcision of the Heart,' 1.7, in *Works*, 1:405.
[178] Ibid.
[179] The title of an article by Randy Maddox that informs much of this section, see Maddox, 'A Change of Affections.'
[180] Ibid., p. 4.

"habituated rational control" moral psychology' for 'an empiricist-inspired "affectional" moral psychology.'[181] It was a change, as Maddox argues, from an inherited view, derived from Plato, and commonly accepted within the Church at the time, that viewed reason as the key factor in gaining control of the passionate side of human nature, thereby enabling us, albeit by God's grace, to live moral lives, to an almost Augustinian recognition, mediated particularly by the Moravians, that reason is itself subject to the passions, and therefore of no ultimate help without a change of the affections through a work of God's grace in the heart. It was encouraged by Wesley's continued reflection on 'empiricist moral thought' which he had encountered at Oxford: that 'humans are *moved* to action only as we are experientially *affected*.'[182] Consequently, this combined Moravian and empiricist influence led Wesley to place increasing weight on the senses as a means of human knowing, resulting, as Maddox states, in his pre-Aldersgate focus 'on the importance of "feeling" the love of God.'

> But this time it was not so much *his* love for God that he longed to feel, it was *God's* reconciling love for him—an experience which he described in the biblical terms of "having the love of God shed abroad in his heart, through the Holy Ghost which is given unto him."[183]

This inverted the essential dynamic of Wesley's 'religion of the heart,' highlighting the responsive role of the affections:

> We must be holy of heart, and holy in life…. But we must love God, before we can be holy at all; this being the root of all holiness. Now we cannot love God, till we know he loves us. "We love him, because he first

[181] Ibid., p. 13.
[182] Empiricism held that there is 'no idea in the mind that is not first in the senses.' Ibid., pp. 12-13.
[183] Ibid., p. 11. Regarding the charge of 'enthusiasm' Kenneth Cracknell and Susan J. White point out that, 'In his writings and sermons John Wesley sought a middle course between these two extremes: between "mere formality" on the one hand and "the wildness of enthusiasm" on the other… Enthusiasm and indifference were, for Wesley, "danger on the right and on the left," and it is because of the continuous attempt to walk the line between them in the spiritual life that Wesley has been famously characterized as a "reasonable enthusiast."' See, Kenneth Cracknell and Susan J. White, *An Introduction to World Methodism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 147.

> loved us." And we cannot know his pardoning love to us, till his Spirit witnesses it to our spirit.[184]

Here we see clearly how at Aldersgate the duty to love is eclipsed by the affective experience of God's gracious love through the 'inward witness' of the Spirit. And it was not only a matter of justification and assurance, but of 'new birth'– the beginning of sanctification and renewal in the image of God.[185] As Maddox explains,

> God is providing the possibility for a change in our enduring dispositions… This renewal involves both the quickening of our affections in response to the affect of God's love poured in our hearts and the tempering of these affections into holy dispositions. Since holiness of thought, word, and action would flow from such renewal, Wesley identified the essential goal of all true religion as the recovery of holy tempers. His heart religion was ultimately a religion of the *tempered heart*.[186]

The impact of Aldersgate should not be underestimated. As a result of his 'heart-warming' experience, Wesley's 'religion of the heart' became centred on this 'change of affections' with its emphasis on the love of God shed abroad in our hearts as the motivational and enabling power for holy living. Likewise, Wesley's instantaneous experience of justification and new birth at Aldersgate provided him with a view of sanctification conceived not only in terms of gradual growth but also as instantaneous gift, as he refused to limit the gracious possibilities of God's love at work in us. The fruits of this deeply personal experience would soon be seen in the lives and communal practices of the early Methodists.

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[184] Wesley, Sermon 10, 'The Witness of the Spirit, I' (1746), §I.8, in *Works*, 1:274. Cited by Maddox, 'A Change of Affections,' p. 18.

[185] In his sermon, 'The New Birth' (1760), Wesley distinguishes between the simultaneous occurrence of justification and new birth. Justification relates 'to that great work which God does for us, in forgiving our sins,' whereas new birth refers 'to the great work which God does in us, in renewing our fallen nature.' Thus, Wesley describes new birth as 'the gate' or 'entrance' to sanctification: "When we are born again, then our sanctification, our inward and outward holiness, begins. And thenceforth we are gradually 'to grow up in him who is our head'." Sermon 45, 'The New Birth,'*Works*, 2:186-201.

[186] In Wesley's 'terminology the capacity for simple responsive love is an affection, while a developed enduring disposition to love (or to reject love!) is a temper. And the heart is the seat of the tempers.' Precisely because 'sinful actions and words flow from corrupted tempers,… the problem of sin must ultimately be addressed at this affectional level.' Maddox, 'A Change of Affections,' pp. 16-17.

2.4 A 'social' tradition: the communal practices of the early Methodists

It is not surprising that Wesley's vision of the Christian life was set firmly in the context of community. Wesley was an Anglican for whom *The Book of Common Prayer* was an ever-present reminder of the communal nature of the life of faith. It was natural, therefore, that Wesley should understand his call to holiness in communal terms: 'to raise a holy people,' renew the church, and 'spread scriptural holiness over the land.'[187] It was a large vision, requiring not only faith in God's limitless grace, but also the development of a structure of communal life and practice that would nurture holiness. What emerged during the late 1730s and early 1740s was a threefold pattern of society, class, and band that became the organisational and formational hallmark of Wesley's movement and which provided the necessary disciplined focus, communal support, and mutual accountability appropriate to each stage of the Christian journey toward holiness.[188] By his own analogy, Wesley pictured that journey as beginning at the 'porch' of repentance, leading to the 'door' of justification and new birth, and providing entry into the house of holiness, 'the religion itself.'[189] The genius of Wesley's corresponding system was that the society provided access and encouragement to those seeking faith, the weekly class meetings kept them on track toward justification and new birth, whilst the band meetings were for those pressing on to perfection. Together, the society, class, and band, along with the Christian practices they fostered, constituted an intentional system of 'Christian communal

[187] Wesley, 'Minutes of Several Conversations,' §§4-5, in *Works*, 10:875.
[188] The 'society' denotes the local gathering of Methodists in a particular place and reflects the developing social phenomenon of the 'society' in eighteenth century England, e.g. Religious Societies, Friendly Societies, Missionary Societies. The society was divided into 'classes' of about a dozen members under the care of a 'class leader.' The 'band' was a smaller, voluntary grouping of five to seven persons, usually of the same sex and marital status.
[189] Wesley, 'The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained,' VI.4, in Wesley, *Works*, 9:227.

formation'[190] that had as its aim the transformation of individuals, the church, and wider society in the holiness that is the promise and gift of God.

The Society

The first of the many Methodist societies that constituted Wesley's connexion, transforming and radicalizing 'the Anglican model' of religious societies by their close association,[191] met at the Foundery, a disused cannon factory, on 23 July 1740, following Wesley's break with the Moravians.[192] With bench seating for fifteen hundred,[193] preaching services became a central activity, and included Scripture reading, prayer, and hymn singing, providing ample scope for Charles Wesley to give verse to the great themes of Christian faith that played such a vital role in shaping the theology and spirituality of the early Methodists, many of whom had little education. The services provided accessible points of entry to curious outsiders, with the only initial condition of society membership being 'a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins.'[194] After a visit to the Newcastle society in February 1743, however, when he expelled sixty-four persons,[195] Wesley published the *General Rules*[196] which qualified that initial openness by requiring members to 'continue to evidence their desire of salvation,'

> *First*, By doing no harm, by avoiding evil in every kind – especially that which is most generally practiced… *Secondly*, By doing good, by being in every kind merciful after their power, as they have opportunity doing good of every possible sort and as far as is possible to all men… *Thirdly*, By attending upon all the ordinances of God. Such are: The public worship of God; The ministry of the word, either read or expounded; The

[190] Watson's terminology, see Watson, *Pursuing Social Holiness*, p. 2.
[191] Walsh and Taylor, 'Introduction.'
[192] Watson, *Pursuing Social Holiness*, p. 49.
[193] Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, p. 110.
[194] Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England, 1688-1791* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 389.
[195] Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, p. 138.
[196] John Wesley, 'The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies' (1743), in *Works*, 9:67-75.

> supper of the Lord; Family and private prayer; Searching the Scriptures; and Fasting, or abstinence.[197]

These three memorable rules – do no harm, do good, and attend upon all the ordinances of God – guided the early Methodists in the growth toward holiness, and led to Wesley's description of the society as a company of those '"having the form, and seeking the power of godliness", united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.'[198] To help in this quest, Wesley introduced several new practices, including the watch-night service, the Covenant service, and the love-feast, an idea borrowed from the Moravians.

Class Meeting

Unlike the society and band, the class meeting – described by Rupp as 'one of Wesley's happiest improvisations'[199] – is distinctive to Methodism. It owes its origin to Wesley's realisation of the potential of what began as a way of collecting funds to pay off the debt on the New Room, Bristol, by dividing the society into neighbourhood groups or classes, each with an appointed leader who collected the contributions.[200] Wesley had inadvertently struck on a method of both oversight and nurture that was perfectly suited to the dynamic of the revival. Those who responded to field-preaching could now be nurtured under the supervision of trusted leaders, as the practice of visiting members in their homes soon developed into weekly class meetings, where 'a more full inquiry was made into the behaviour of every person…advice or reproof was given as need required, quarrels made up, misunderstandings removed; and after an hour or

[197] Ibid., §§4-7, 9:70-73.
[198] Ibid., §2, 9:69.
[199] Rupp, *Religion in England*, p. 290.
[200] Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, p. 118.

two spent in this labour of love, they concluded with prayer and thanksgiving.'[201] David Lowes Watson describes Wesley's class system as 'accountable discipleship' exercised by class leaders and members themselves.[202]

Band Meeting

The band meeting, however, was the real 'engine of holiness' in Wesley's communal system of formation, as Kevin Watson demonstrates in his detailed study.[203] Based on his experience of the Moravian *banden*,[204] Wesley's bands encouraged those who had already experienced justification and new birth to press on to perfection. A typical band consisted of five to seven members of the same gender and marital status,[205] thus creating a safe and open environment where members could talk freely about their innermost lives without fear or embarrassment. The level of openness and personal honesty required is evidenced by the *Rules of the Band Societies*,[206] and *Directions Given to the Band Societies.*[207] Although membership was voluntary, unlike the classes, Wesley actively encouraged participation, introducing penitent bands to restore backsliders, and select bands for the more advanced in their pursuit of perfection, the latter developing from Wesley's desire to 'have a select company to whom I might unbosom myself on all occasions.'[208] It is particularly striking that Wesley drew up no rules nor appointed leaders for the select societies, but instead relied on the spiritual maturity of the members, who had, as Wesley put it, 'the best

[201] Cited in ibid., p. 119.
[202] David Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and Significance* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002), p. 125.
[203] Watson, *Pursuing Social Holiness*, p. 94.
[204] Ibid., p. 24.
[205] Ibid., pp. 2-3.
[206] John Wesley, 'Rules of the Band Societies' (1738), in *Works*, 9:77.
[207] John Wesley, 'Directions given to the Band Societies' (1744), in ibid., 9:79.
[208] John Wesley, 'A Plain Account of the People called Methodists' (1749), VII.1-VIII.2, ibid., 9:268-70.

rule of all in their hearts,'[209] revealing, as Collins remarks, 'that as grace increases, so, too, does responsible liberty.'[210]

The importance Wesley attached to the class and band for the flourishing of both individuals and the movement is reflected in the comment that 'without this religious connexion and intercourse, the most ardent attempts, by mere preaching, have proved no lasting use.'[211]

The Means of Grace

John Wesley needed no persuading of the importance of Christian practices for growth in holiness, as his lifelong emphasis on the means of grace makes clear. And yet, it is only in recent scholarship, that their central importance to Wesley's project has been fully recognised, with Henry Knight asserting that without them, 'We cannot properly evaluate Wesley's understanding of the Christian life – and his call to Christian perfection' – because they 'form an interrelated context within which the Christian life is lived and through which relationships with God and one's neighbour are maintained.'[212] Dean Blevins describes them as 'an ecology of holistic practices' constituting Wesley's 'framework of Methodist praxis.'[213] According to Maddox, 'Wesley valued the means of grace both as avenues through which God conveys the gracious Presence that enables our responsive growth in holiness and as exercises by

[209] Ibid., VIII.3, 9:270.
[210] Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, p. 252.
[211] John Wesley, 'Farther Thoughts upon Christian Perfection' (1763), I.37., in Wesley, *Works*, 13:120.
[212] Henry H. Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace*, Pietist and Wesleyan Studies, 3. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1992), p. 2.
[213] Dean G. Blevins, 'The Means of Grace: Towards a Wesleyan Praxis of Spiritual Formation,' *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32, no. 1 (1997): p. 71.

which we responsibly nurture that holiness.'[214] Andrew Thompson, concurs, stating that they provide 'an entire model for living the Christian life in a way that leads to true spiritual growth.'[215]

That the grace of God was active and present in the dedicated and disciplined participation in all the means of grace was indelibly woven into Wesley's understanding of the virtues, affectional moral psychology, and religion of the heart. It informed his firm belief that, as Theodore Runyon remarks, 'it is finite means that mediate infinite reality.'[216] Hence Wesley's affirmation in his sermon, *The Means of Grace*:

> By 'means of grace' I understand outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God, and appointed for this end – to be the *ordinary* channels whereby he might convey to men preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.[217]

It is precisely this appreciation of God's grace that led Wesley to broaden his understanding of the means of grace by attending to other ways in which God's grace works in our lives, resulting in his threefold categorisation: the *instituted, prudential* and *general* means of grace.[218]

The Instituted means of grace

In his sermon, *The Means of Grace*, Wesley's focus is on the means specifically 'ordained' or 'instituted' by Christ, identifying three: 'prayer,…searching the

[214] Randy L. Maddox, 'Reconnecting the Means to the End: A Wesleyan Prescription for the Holiness Movement,' ibid. 33, no. 2 (1998): p. 42.
[215] Andrew C. Thompson, *The Means of Grace: Traditioned Practice in Today's World* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2015), p. 135.
[216] Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), p. 114.
[217] John Wesley, 'The Means of Grace' (1746), in §II.I., in *Works*, 1:381.
[218] See Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*. For an excellent contemporary restatement, see, Thompson, *The Means of Grace*.

Scriptures… and receiving the Lord's Supper.'[219] To these, Wesley adds fasting and Christian conference (or conversation) in the 'Large' *Minutes* of 1763.[220] He refers to these *instituted* means as 'ordinances of God,' or 'works of piety.'[221] In his firm attachment to them, however, Wesley never loses sight of their ultimate end, to nurture a 'knowledge and love of God,' and to forget this is to keep 'Christianity out of the heart by those very means ordained for the bringing it in.'[222] The means of grace and the religion of the heart were firmly conjoined.

The Prudential means of grace

Wesley adopted the terminology of Anglican theologian John Norris to describe those practices which we discern to be good for our Christian growth as *prudential* means of grace,[223] and these, as Thompson suggests, fall into three broad areas: 'particular rules for personal discipleship, small group fellowship, and the works of mercy.'[224] Being contextual practices, the list is not exhaustive and is open to expansion; as Ole Borgen remarks, "Whatever is conducive to holiness and love becomes, to that extent, a means of grace."[225] The class and band are clearly means of grace, but the inclusion of 'rules' appears surprising. The rules, however, as Thompson argues, should be viewed from a pastoral rather than a regulatory perspective because they provide 'a method by which Wesley's teaching on sanctification could be embodied in daily life.'[226]

[219] Wesley, 'The Means of Grace,' II.I., in *Works*, 1:381.
[220] Richard P. Heitzenrater, 'The Exercise of the Presence of God: Holy Conferencing as a Means of Grace,' in *Perfecting Perfection: Essays in Honor of Henry D. Rack*, ed. Robert Webster, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015), p. 75.
[221] Andrew C. Thompson, 'The Practical Theology of the General Rules,' *The Asbury Journal* 38, no. 2 (2013): p. 9.
[222] Wesley, 'The Means of Grace,' II.I., in *Works*, 1:381.
[223] Heitzenrater, 'The Exercise of the Presence of God,' p. 75.
[224] Thompson, *The Means of Grace*, p. 102.
[225] Cited in 'The Practical Theology of the General Rules,' p. 16.
[226] Ibid., p. 7.

As for works of mercy, Wesley often referred to the instituted and prudential means of grace as *works of piety* and *works of mercy*, corresponding to his vision of holiness: love of God and neighbour. Their formational importance is highlighted by Maddox, citing Wesley's sermon, *On Zeal*:

> In a Christian believer *love* sits upon the throne, ... namely love of God and [other humans] .... In a circle near the throne are all *holy tempers*: long-suffering, gentleness, meekness [etc.] .... In an exterior circle are all the *works of mercy*, whether to the souls or bodies of others. By these we exercise all holy tempers; by these we continually improve them, so that these are real *means of grace*, although this is not commonly adverted to.[227]

Locating works of mercy in close proximity to *holy tempers* leads Maddox to deduce that Wesley valued their 'unique contribution among the other means of grace to well-rounded Christian formation.'[228] This is confirmed in the sermon, *On Visiting the Sick*, where Wesley describes works of mercy as being 'real means of grace.'[229] Wesley viewed engagement with issues of human need as opportunities to encounter Christ and grow more like him.

The general means of grace

Whilst there is a certain familiarity with the *instituted* and *prudential* means of grace, which together comprise what Wesley terms the *particular* means of grace, their counterpart, the *general* means of grace, has been overlooked. Yet, as Andrew Thompson argues, the *general* means are foundational because without them 'the very notion of a set of practices that mediate the transformative power of God's love is rendered hollow.'[230] This may appear to be a large claim, but the key to appreciating

[227] Maddox, '"Visit the Poor",' pp. 72-3. John Wesley, Sermon 92, 'On Zeal' (1781), §5, *Works*, 3:313.
[228] Maddox, '"Visit the Poor",' p. 76.
[229] John Wesley, Sermon 98, 'On Visiting the Sick' (1786), §1, in *Works*, 3:385.
[230] Andrew C. Thompson, 'The General Means of Grace,' *Methodist History* 51, no. 4 (2013): p. 249.

their importance is their dispositional nature: they are concerned with developing inward attitudes and motivations that are attentive and open to God. So, what are these general means? In the 1745 Minutes, Wesley informs us, in answer to the question, 'How should we wait for the fulfilling of this promise [of entire sanctification]?'

> In universal obedience; in keeping all the commandments; in denying ourselves, and taking up our cross daily. These are the general means which God hath ordained for our receiving his sanctifying grace.[231]

Later, in the 'Large' *Minutes*, Wesley concludes his explanation of the instituted and prudential means of grace by stating,

> These means may be used without fruit. But there are some means which cannot; namely, watching, denying ourselves, taking up our cross, [and the] exercise of the presence of God.[232]

These practices are understood to be fruitful because they require an inward intentionality and cannot be conducted in a mechanistic or unthinking manner. The general means of grace, therefore, serve as an important corrective to the ever-present possibility of our being drawn away from God, described by Wesley as 'dissipation,' or 'the uncentring of the soul from God.'[233] Hence, Heitzenrater regards 'the exercise of the presence of God' as the 'focus' of Wesley's advice in the 'Large' *Minutes* and the 'climax of his discussion of the general means of grace.'[234] Attentiveness to God and an openness to God's grace is central to growth in Christ-like love. This is succinctly summed up by Thompson, explaining Wesley's 'virtue theology:'

> It is here that the logic of the general means of grace *vis-à-vis* all the other means of grace (instituted and prudential) finds its origin. When persons embody Christlike virtues, they gain a "right state of soul," which

[231] Ibid., p. 250.
[232] Ibid.
[233] Thompson is citing Wesley's sermon 79, 'On Dissipation' (1784). Ibid., p. 253.
[234] Heitzenrater, 'The Exercise of the Presence of God,' p. 77.

> is a "habitual disposition" that is equivalent to what is meant by "holiness." This is, for Wesley, the substance of "inward religion." It is not inward to the exclusion of the outward; rather, it is a logically prior inward that, once attained, leads one to certain outward actions and habits. The practice of discipleship that arises out of a virtuous disposition has the ability to further develop that disposition exactly because it is a practice done from a right intention. The outward form of the work is worth nothing on its own; but with a rightly formed heart guiding it, it becomes a true means of grace.[235]

Contrary to the accusation that his unrelenting emphasis on the means of grace amounted to salvation by works, Wesley's theological vision was determined by an extraordinary confidence in the grace of God, which led him to stress the importance of taking each and every opportunity to engage in all the means that God so graciously provides for growth in holiness.

2.5 A controversial tradition: 'instantaneous' or 'gradual'

John Wesley's emphasis on holiness as central to the Christian life was not in itself distinctive or controversial. Holiness was both a scriptural theme and widely acknowledged within Christian tradition. He may have been overzealous, but he was not exceptional in its pursuit, nor were his methods. Holiness was to be achieved through a disciplined and single-minded devotion to God and neighbour made possible by God's grace as the Christian engaged in works of piety and mercy, in company with others. Becoming holy was a gradual process of growth and renewal in the image of God, only perfected in heaven. This understanding of the 'how' and 'when' of holiness underwent a serious revision, however, as a result of Wesley's encounter with the Moravians and his subsequent Aldersgate experience. Just as Aldersgate convinced

[235] Thompson, 'The General Means of Grace,' p. 256.

him of the instantaneous nature and gift of justifying faith, so too he came to believe that sanctification could be received in an instant through a work of God's grace within a believer's lifetime. It was this duality of holiness, viewed both as gradual growth and instantaneous gift, reflecting the synthesis of High Church Anglican and Moravian piety, that gave rise to Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection and to the distinctive vision of the Christian life that is the early Wesleyan holiness tradition. Moreover, it was the instantaneous element, particularly the suggestion that entire sanctification might be experienced in this life and not only at death, that transposed a previously benign vision of holiness into one that would prove controversial and divisive and that would require continued defence, refinement, and restatement throughout Wesley's long life and beyond, sowing the seeds for future changes and departures from Wesley's original vision. Of particular note was Wesley's occasional reference to a 'second blessing,' as in a letter to Samuel Bardsley (1772), confirming, as Collins highlights, that 'it was Wesley himself, and not the American holiness movement, who first championed the notion of a "second" work of grace:'

> Never be ashamed of the old Methodist doctrine. Press all believers to go on to perfection. Insist everywhere on the *second blessing* as receivable in a moment, and receivable now, by simple faith.[236]

The Otley outbreak

The controversial nature of Wesley's belief in the instantaneous possibility of perfection only became fully apparent when a series of claims to perfection among Otley Methodists in 1758 signalled the beginning of a widespread outbreak of occurrences over the five-year period to 1763 – numbering 652 persons according to

[236] Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, p. 281.

Wesley's records[237] – culminating in the perfection controversy of 1762-63 with its lasting repercussions.[238] Prior to this, during the first two decades of the revival, Wesley noted that claims to perfection were few and 'nearly at a stand'.[239] What had been a theoretical belief in the possibility of perfection in this life, based on his reading of scripture, was confirmed by numerous personal testimonies, to which Wesley gave much credence. Charles Wesley, however, was sceptical and concerned about the excesses of enthusiasm generated. He distanced himself from John, emphasising perfection as a gift at death, prefaced by gradual growth, even though some of his earlier hymns may have poetically suggested otherwise.[240] Yet despite the misgivings of Charles and others, Wesley never wavered from his distinctive view that perfection was possible in this life and was strengthened in this belief by the numerous "living witnesses."[241]

What might explain this sudden surge of claims to perfection? Rack points to the extreme views of some of Wesley's preachers who led people to fear that their salvation was conditional on perfection.[242] However, a more likely explanation is that

[237] Martin Wellings. ''What is our calling's glorious hope?' The expectation and expression of holiness in Methodism,' in *Peterborough Theological Society*, p. 9. Best also notes: 'By March 1761 [Wesley] was receiving about 30 claims of perfection a week from London Methodists alone.' Best, *Charles Wesley*, p. 259.

[238] The extreme views of two of Wesley's preachers, Thomas Maxfield and George Bell, led to their expulsion from the London society together with around two hundred of their followers, and led to wariness about too great an emphasis on the doctrine. For a full account, see: Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, pp. 334-42.

[239] Ibid., p. 334.

[240] In the early years of the revival, the brothers' attitudes appear to have been reversed: John was cautious, fearing that sin committed later by claimants would discredit the doctrine, whereas Charles suggested that the gift removed the 'root' of sin. Ibid., p. 340. The final verse of 'Love divine' (1747) reveals Charles Wesley's earlier view, particularly when it is noted that the original second line read, 'pure and sinless let us be'. Richard Watson and Kenneth Trickett, eds., *Companion to Hymns & Psalms* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1988), p. 180.

[241] Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, pp. 398-9. In an important study, Amy Caswell Bratton has explored the accounts of some of these 'living witnesses' and shown how they helped spread an understanding and a desire for perfection amongst early Methodists. Amy Caswell Bratton, *Witnesses of Perfect Love: Narratives of Christian Perfection in Early Methodism* (Toronto, ON: Clements Academic, 2014).

[242] Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 335.

Wesley himself was responsible, with Maddox detecting a shift to a bolder emphasis on 'immediate attainment' as he became concerned that he might otherwise be 'hindering his people from experiencing the blessing he believed Scripture promised them.'[243]

Underlying this shift were modifications in Wesley's assumptions. First, he reversed his earlier view that an entirely sanctified person would not fall back into sin, thereby discrediting their claim, accepting instead the possibility of such regrettable lapses.[244] Secondly, and more importantly, Wesley modified his definition of sin – 'a voluntary transgression of a known law'[245] – by qualifying the term, 'a known law,' to mean that which is *personally* known to the individual rather than all that has been made known in Scripture.[246] This, Wesley describes, as '*sin properly-so-called*,'[247] and it is this definition that governs his understanding of the attainable perfection to which he called the early Methodists. Accordingly, Wesley rejects an alternative definition, '*sin improperly so called' – '*an involuntary transgression of a divine law, known or unknown' – on the basis that: 'there is no such perfection in this life as excludes these involuntary transgressions which I apprehend to be naturally consequent on the ignorance and mistakes inseparable from mortality.'[248] For this reason, Wesley declares, '*sinless perfection* is a phrase I never use, lest I should seem to contradict myself.'[249] Instead, Wesley championed, in Colin Williams' memorable phrase, an 'imperfect perfection,'[250] which allowed for the infirmities, ignorance and mistakes

[243] Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, p. 183.
[244] Ibid., pp. 183-4.
[245] This definition 'appeared… in a letter to Mrs Pendarves in 1731.' Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 399.
[246] Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, p. 184.
[247] John Wesley, 'Thoughts on Christian Perfection' (1760), Q. 6, in *Works*, 13:61-2.
[248] Ibid., 13:62.
[249] Ibid.
[250] Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today*, p. 60.

that are part of the human condition. In so doing, as Rack comments, Wesley was operating paradoxically with 'two definitions of perfection, one attainable in this life and the other not; and this in turn depended on two definitions of sin.'[251] This may account for Charles' disagreement with his brother, suggesting that he was unable to accept John's qualifications regarding sin and perfection and took instead the contrary view, keeping the bar set high. Wesley's definition of sin would continue to be questioned, leading key twentieth century exponents of perfection, such as Robert Newton Flew and William Sangster, to regard it as inadequate.[252]

Perfect love: dynamic, relational, and affectional

The determining factor in John Wesley's understanding of Christian perfection was not sin and its eradication, however, but love. Indeed, Collins goes further, stating that 'Wesley's ultimate hermeneutic… [was] not "love,"… but "holy love,"' citing Wesley's assertion that "no true Christian holiness can exist without the love of God for its foundation."'[253] Hence the perfection for which Wesley argued and which he regarded as attainable in this life was conceived in terms of perfect love:

> The loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This implies that no wrong temper, none contrary to love, remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words, and actions are governed by pure love.[254]

In offering this definition of perfection, Wesley sees nothing 'contradictory' in a person being 'filled with pure love' yet 'subject at the same time to ignorance and mistake!'[255] Wesley is articulating a dynamic, affectional, and relational understanding of Christian perfection that is concerned with the quality of love that is experienced and exhibited

[251] Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 399.
[252] See, Flew, *The Idea of Perfection*. And, W. E. Sangster, *The Path to Perfection: An Examination and Restatement of John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection* (London: Epworth Press, 1957).
[253] Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, p. 8.
[254] John Wesley, 'Thoughts on Christian Perfection' (1760), Q. 1, in *Works*, 13:57.
[255] Ibid., Q. 3, 13:59.

in the life of the believer and which is always the gift of God's gracious work. Whether it be gradual or instantaneous, common to both is the way in which our affections are stirred and changed into enduring dispositions to love by the knowledge and experience of God's love for us in Christ imparted by the Spirit shed abroad in our hearts. With such an understanding of Christian perfection, it is not difficult to see how the instantaneous appropriation of the gift came to complement Wesley's lifelong advocacy of its gradual nature through the focussed and disciplined practice of all the means of grace. If the pure love of God, known in the heart and exhibited in life was the goal, then Wesley had no difficulty in accepting that this was a gift that God would not withhold, and which could be received in an instant, just like justification and new birth. And if the gradual growth in holiness was characterised by its quiet and imperceptible nature, Wesley was not surprised that the instantaneous gift was accompanied by such intensity of feeling that the recipient 'would scarce be able to refrain' from speaking of it, 'the fire would be so hot within him – his desire to declare the loving-kindness of the Lord carrying away like a torrent.'[256] It would be a mistake, however, to think that Wesley is giving way to subjective experience alone. On the contrary, he is clear that the veracity of any claim to the gift of perfection may be witnessed by others who will be able to testify to its correspondence in the recipient's lifestyle by 'words and actions' that are 'holy and unblameable.'[257]

2.6 The maturing of a tradition

The testimonies of the many 'living witnesses' to the gift of perfection energised John Wesley in his efforts to urge the Methodist people to 'go on to perfection,' providing

[256] Ibid., Q. 17, 13:68.
[257] Ibid., Q. 20, 13:69.

the added impetus for a clear and convincing restatement of the doctrine, especially in the light of the perfectionist controversy. This came in the form of a book, 'A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,'[258] and a sermon, 'The Scripture Way of Salvation.'[259] Taken together they reflect Wesley's mature views on Christian perfection and the journey towards holiness of heart and life.

'A Plain Account of Christian Perfection'

In February 1766, Wesley published 'A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, as believed and taught by the Rev. Mr. John Wesley from the year 1725, to the year 1765.' As the title suggests, it is a personal rather than systematic account, comprising numerous extracts from previous writings – sermons, tracts, letters, hymns, Journals, and testimonies – as well as new material that, edited and gathered together, were intended to present a single, straightforward, and consistent account of his long-held belief. That belief is helpfully summarised by Wesley in a set of eleven 'short propositions' that conclude 'A Plain Account,' which reflect his mature understanding.[260] Perfection is: (1) scriptural, (2) occurs after our justification, but (3) before death. It is not (4) '*absolute*,' nor (5) '*infallible*,' nor (6) helpfully described as '*sinless*.' (7) 'It is *perfect love*. This is the *essence* of it.' It is not a settled state, but (8) '*improvable'* and (9) '*amissible*, capable of being lost,' and is therefore (10) 'constantly both preceded and followed by a *gradual* work.' As to its instantaneous nature, there is (11) clearly such an 'instant,' though not everyone will perceive it: what matters is that 'they now experience what we teach. They now are *all love*; they *now* rejoice, pray, and praise without ceasing.' As to whether 'sin is only *suspended* in them' rather

[258] Wesley, 'Plain Account,' in ibid., 13:136-91.
[259] John Wesley, Sermon 43, 'The Scripture Way of Salvation' (1765), in ibid., 2:152-69.
[260] For what follows, see, 'Plain Account,' in ibid., §27, 13:187-88.

than '*destroyed*,' Wesley is ambivalent: '*Call* it which you please. They are *all love* to-day – and they take no thought for the morrow.' This succinct summary confirms that Wesley's understanding of Christian perfection is dynamic, relational and affectional.

In a final appeal, Wesley invites his critics to 'Look at it again; survey it on every side, and that with the closest attention,' in the hope that they will discover, from whatever vantage point they look, the truth of the doctrine that has been central to his life's work.

> In one view it is purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God. It is the giving God all our heart; it is one desire and design ruling all our tempers. It is the devoting, not a part, but all our soul, body, and substance to God. In another view, it is all the mind which was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked. It is the circumcision of the heart from all filthiness, all inward as well as outward pollution. It is a renewal of the heart in the whole image of God, the full likeness of him that created it. In yet another, it is the loving God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves. Now take it in which of these views you please (for there is no material difference) and this is the whole and sole perfection, as a train of writings prove to a demonstration, which I have believed and taught for these forty years, from the year I725 to the year 1765.[261]

Taken together, these several 'views' confirm that Wesley's understanding of perfection was not governed by an emphasis on the experience itself, but on the way that God's gracious gift of perfection is expressed in the everyday life of the Christian. Wesley's perfection was transformational rather than experiential.

'The Scripture Way of Salvation'

Written in 1765, the same year as 'A Plain Account,' and described by Outler as 'the most successful summary of the Wesleyan vision of the *ordo salutis* in the entire

[261] Ibid., 13:189-91.

sermon corpus,'[262] 'The Scripture Way of Salvation' provides Wesley with the opportunity to reaffirm and clarify the vital elements of his theological vision, woven around the twin foci of justification and sanctification. Taking a favourite text, 'Ye are saved through faith' (Ephesians 2:8), Wesley expounds its two key words to show the centrality of faith and the scope of salvation, conceived as 'the entire work of God, from the first dawning of grace in the soul till it is consummated in glory.' And it is all a matter of grace, whether the prevenient grace that draws us to the Father, the grace that justifies us through 'all that Christ hath done,' or the grace that accompanies 'the gradual work of sanctification' – salvation is the work of grace whose goal is perfection, 'perfect love,' defined afresh in relational and affectional terms:

> It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul. It is love "rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, in everything giving thanks."[263]

As with grace, so with faith. Wesley asserts that we are saved – justified and sanctified – by faith alone, 'the only condition' of our salvation.[264] This is a crucial statement. From the beginnings of the revival Wesley has faced the constant charge that he subverts the importance of faith by teaching 'that we are sanctified by our works.' This is far from the case, as Wesley resolutely asserts:

> Exactly as we are justified by faith, so are we sanctified by faith. Faith is the condition: none is sanctified but he that believes; without faith no man is sanctified. And it is the only condition: this alone is sufficient for sanctification.[265]

[262] Albert C. Outler, 'An Introductory Comment: The Scripture Way of Salvation,' in ibid., 2:154. The citations that follow are taken from the sermon.
[263] Ibid., I.9, 2:160.
[264] Ibid., II.4, III.1, 3, 2:162-63.
[265] Ibid., III.3, 2:163.

But this does not negate the place of works of piety and mercy that Wesley valued so highly as means of grace and as an expression of lived faith in the pattern of Christ. To this end, Wesley offers a carefully nuanced argument for their continuing importance by drawing parallels between the place of repentance and good works in relation to both our justification and sanctification, whilst maintaining that faith continues to be the only condition for each. He does this by distinguishing between what is absolutely necessary (faith), and what is also necessary although 'not necessary in the *same sense*…, nor in the *same degree* (repentance and good works), 'for these fruits are only necessary *conditionally*, if there be time and opportunity for them. Otherwise a man may be sanctified without them. But he cannot be sanctified without faith.'[266] It is precisely because faith is the only absolute condition of sanctification, that it is a present possibility. To think that 'I must first *be* or *do* thus or thus' is proof that 'you are seeking it by works,' but 'If you seek it by faith, you may expect it *as you are*: and if as you are, then expect it *now*.' Indeed, states Wesley, these three are inseparably connected – 'expect it *by faith*; expect it *as you are*; and expect it *now*! To deny one of them is to deny them all.'[267]

'The Scripture Way of Salvation' demonstrates that whilst Wesley was fully committed to the gradual process of sanctification through the faithful, grace-filled practice of works of piety and mercy, he was equally committed to faith (itself a gift of God) being the one absolute condition of sanctification. It is this unshakeable belief that leads Wesley to maintain that God may complete his work in us at any moment. This is why

[266] Ibid., III.13, 2:167.
[267] Ibid., III.18, 2:169.

Wesley encouraged the early Methodists *both* to wait for it, through works of piety and mercy, *and* to expect it now, as a gift of God's grace.

Yet, though Wesley advocated the possibility of perfection so passionately, and devoted his entire adult life to its pursuit, it is surprising that he did not claim to have attained it himself. He saw it in others, however, and none more so than in John Fletcher, the saintly vicar of Madeley, and Wesley's designated successor (prior to his death in 1785). Fletcher was a supporter of Wesley's doctrine, though he differed from him in advocating a dispensational theology in which he equated entire sanctification with the baptism of the Holy Spirit – a view that would soon prove influential in its subsequent interpretation, as we shall see.[268] Wesley corrected Fletcher on this, yet despite their differences, he clearly believed that Fletcher had been blessed with the gift for which both had sought, preaching at Fletcher's funeral on the text, 'Mark, the perfect man…' (Psalm 37:37), and declaring, 'one equal to him I have not known, – one so inwardly and outwardly devoted to God.'[269]

Yet Fletcher, though he did admit to the gift, was reticent. But in Wesley's case, it seems that it was not reticence but a matter of never having experienced the fullness of faith that he judged others to have found. Perhaps he was too sophisticated and controlled by his rational side to allow space for his affective nature to emerge, for all his emphasis upon it. Or, perhaps, as Rack suggests, Wesley was 'judging himself… by his remarkably exacting standards.'[270] The truth of it may be that it was the accounts

[268] Patrick Streiff, *Reluctant Saint? A Theological Biography of Fletcher of Madeley*, trans. G. W. S. Knowles (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2001), p. 208.
[269] John Wesley, Sermon 114, 'On the Death of John Fletcher' (1785), in *Works*, 3:609-29.
[270] Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 550.

and witness of others that were, as they had always been, the powerful motivator and inspiration for his spiritual journey. Whether or not John Wesley was perfected in love in this life is not for us to say. Nonetheless, as Wesley was inspired by the lives of others, so he was and remains an inspiring example to us of what God can do with a life of single-minded and wholehearted devotion to loving God and neighbour. In this way, Wesley's life may be regarded as a narrative of perfection.

2.7 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that holiness was John Wesley's enduring vision of the Christian life, and that he was not alone in taking this view. It found expression in his doctrine of Christian perfection and in the communal practices of the early Methodists. The perfection for which Wesley sought was understood in scriptural terms as perfect love of God and neighbour. It was mediated to Wesley through the traditions of the Church of England and medieval piety, rooted in the virtue tradition. It became a tradition in its own right after Aldersgate through a synthesis of High Anglican and Moravian piety, bringing together the Anglican emphasis on gradual growth in holiness through disciplined practice of the means of grace and the Moravian belief in the present experience of God's grace. The consequent vision of the Christian life was understood in relational and affectional terms as the recovery of the image of God, distorted by sin, made possible by the grace of God affecting and transforming our innermost dispositions, nurturing growth in perfect love to the exclusion of sin, understood as a voluntary transgression of a known law. Such change was expected, encouraged, and graciously realised through intentional engagement in the means of grace, works of piety and mercy, in company with others in society, class, and band, through which the early Methodists held themselves accountable to one

another in pursuit of their goal. It was also to be expected as an instantaneous work of grace at any point in a believer's journey, inspiring an intensity of desire that led some within the movement to experience such a perfection in love, further inspiring others. Despite the controversies generated by such claims and criticism of the doctrine itself, John Wesley maintained to the end of his life that it was for this reason that God had raised up the Methodist movement and that the doctrine was its 'grand depositum.'

Yet even within his lifetime, as evidenced by the Perfectionist controversy and the disagreement with his brother over claims to perfection and the definition of sin, it became clear that Wesley's doctrine would leave an uneasy legacy. A gradual and disciplined pursuit of holy living through faithful participation in the means of grace and diligent attention to works of piety and mercy, was always going to create an uneasy synthesis when combined with an imminent expectation of the gift of entire sanctification through an instantaneous experience, especially when Wesley was not around to provide his careful checks and balances. With Wesley's death on 2 March 1791, the Wesleyan holiness tradition was left without its visionary and champion. The 'grand depositum' was set free from the guiding hand of its founder and exponent and passed into the care of his followers. How would it prosper? Would a tradition forged in the cultural context of the eighteenth century meet the spiritual needs and aspirations of an increasingly urbanised and industrialised society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? And if so, in what ways would the tradition find new expression and interpretation in order to maintain its essence and vitality? These are the questions to which we now turn our attention.

3 The Loss of a tradition

> I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.
>
> John Wesley[271]

In 1950s Britain, concerned about the direction their church was taking, a growing number of Methodists of a conservative evangelical persuasion came together to pray for revival, intent that Methodism should 'fulfil its historic mission' through 'an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.'[272] To this end The Methodist Revival Fellowship (MRF) arranged for the publication of a centenary edition of *The Tongue of Fire: or, the True Power of Christianity* (1856) by William Arthur, a Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society Secretary and 'one of the outstanding ministers of the nineteenth century.'[273] Arthur's book – a clarion call to wait upon and receive the Pentecostal power of the Holy Spirit in order to recapture the missionary zeal of the primitive church – 'epitomized' the 'longing for revival' that had been a persistent feature of Methodism since Wesley's day to counteract the cooling of religious fervour and to provide the spiritual energy for renewed advance.[274] Particularly striking is the link that Arthur establishes between Pentecost and holiness:

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[271] John Wesley, 'Thoughts upon Methodism' (1786), §1, in *Works*, 9:527.
[272] Cited in, Brian Hoare and Ian Randall, *More Than a Methodist: The Life and Ministry of Donald English* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), p. 99. See also, Martin Wellings, 'Renewal, Reunion and Revival: Three British Methodist approaches to 'serving the present age' in the 1950s,' http://divinity.duke.edu/oxford/docs/2007papers/2007-3Wellings.pdf accessed 31 July 2012.
[273] 'Renewal, Reunion and Revival' pp. 20-21. William Arthur, *Tongue of Fire*, Uniform ed. (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1885). Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 153. William Strawson, 'Methodist Theology 1850-1950,' in *A History of The Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George, and Gordon Rupp, 3, (London: Epworth Press, 1983), pp. 187, 91-92.
[274] Gordon S. Wakefield, *Methodist Spirituality*, Exploring Methodism (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1999), p. 40. Revivals featured across the denominations in Victorian Britain, including Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic Churches. See, David W. Bebbington, *Victorian Religious Revivals: Culture and Piety in Local and Global Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. vi.

> What was so rare in human nature is now ordinary, a holy man… Three thousand men permanently raised from death in sin to a life of holiness!... This, of all the spectacles of Pentecost, is the one that speaks in deepest tones to the heart.[275]

Describing Pentecost as a 'moral miracle,' 'the renewing of bad hearts in the image of God,' and proof that 'Humanity may be sanctified,'[276] Arthur clearly identifies with the notion of 'Pentecostal sanctification,'[277] derived from John Fletcher and proclaimed by the American holiness revivalists. Though Arthur distances himself from the revivalists in several respects – advocating prayerful waiting,[278] emphasising lasting moral transformation over momentary experience,[279] and addressing social injustice[280] – we can only conclude that he contributed to the recasting of Wesleyan holiness in favour of the instantaneous reception of entire sanctification by the 'baptism of the Holy Spirit' as empowerment for mission, thereby undermining Wesley's careful balance with its underlying concern for gradual and ongoing growth in holy living, understood as the goal, not the foundation of the Christian life. That the MRF judged Arthur's book to be helpful in recalling Methodism to her 'historic mission' suggests that this interpretation of the tradition continued well into the twentieth century, and that the recasting of the tradition began soon after Wesley's death.

The irony is that as Wesley's balanced interpretation was obscured, so its modified successor went on to exceed and outstrip all expectations, stimulating the rise – both within and especially beyond Methodism – of the holiness movement, which in turn

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[275] Arthur, *Tongue of Fire*, pp. 116-19.
[276] Ibid., pp. 119-24.
[277] Dayton's term for Fletcher's doctrine. Donald W. Dayton, 'Methodism and Pentecostalism,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, ed. William J. Abraham and James E. Kirby, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[278] Arthur, *Tongue of Fire*, p. 301.
[279] Ibid., p. 104.
[280] Ibid., pp. 129-33.

led to the birth of global Pentecostalism.[281] At the same time, the tradition embarked upon the opposite trajectory within mainstream Methodism where it became increasingly marginalised and eventually 'lost' in post-war Britain.

This chapter comprises a set of six case studies focussing on key individuals as representative examples who played pivotal roles in modifying or transforming the Wesleyan holiness tradition during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The case studies consider what each figure thought about holiness, roots that thought in their historical and cultural context – something David Bebbington has shown to be essential to understanding the way that holiness is interpreted[282] – and analyses how each of them shaped the tradition with a view to accounting for the trajectory of development and loss for which I argue. The case studies to be considered are: Phoebe Palmer, Samuel Chadwick, Hugh Price Hughes, Robert Newton Flew, William Sangster, and John Vincent.

3.1 Phoebe Palmer

When John Wesley ordained Thomas Coke for the Americas in 1784 he could hardly have foreseen that it would be from the new world that Wesleyan holiness would re-emerge to revitalise British Methodism with a renewed vigour, passion and intensity, reminiscent of its early days, and yet re-interpreted afresh with the dominant emphasis on the present and immediate reception of the gift of entire sanctification by

[281] See Dayton, 'Methodism and Pentecostalism,' p. 171. 'Pentecostalism cannot be understood apart from its deep roots in the Methodist experience. And Methodism similarly cannot be understood entirely without acknowledgement of this paternity – though for sociological and theological reasons, this relationship has often been suppressed in official historiography.'

[282] 'Holiness was intimately bound up with the spirit of the age.' David W. Bebbington, *Holiness in Nineteenth-Century England* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000), p. 5.

a simple act of faith. Neither could he have envisaged that John Fletcher would help stimulate this reinterpretation by means of his dispensational theology in which he equated entire sanctification with the 'baptism of the Spirit,' a phrase that would be taken up, not only within holiness circles, but by the later Pentecostal and Charismatic movements.[283]

Arguably the most important figure in recasting and disseminating this reinterpretation of Wesley's *grand depositum* in the nineteenth century was American Methodist and holiness revivalist, Phoebe Palmer (1807-74), whose prolific writing, spiritual counsel, and transatlantic ministry, spanning more than three decades, established her reputation as 'the mother of the Holiness Movement.'[284] Instead of calls to press on to perfection, Palmer offered a 'shorter way,'[285] with three steps to its present attainment: 'entire consecration, faith, and testimony.'[286] She provided the theological underpinning that influenced the leaders of more than a dozen holiness denominations, notably William and Catherine Booth of the Salvation Army,[287] re-shaping the Wesleyan holiness tradition over the course of her long career, and during her four-year British visit.[288]

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[283] NB. 'Fletcher left open the question as to how perfection is attained, whether instantaneously, or gradually. There is a growth in grace and love which both precedes and follows baptism with the Spirit.' Streiff, *Reluctant Saint?*, p. 208.
[284] Elaine A. Heath, 'The Quest for Holiness,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, ed. William Abraham and James E. Kirby, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 398.
[285] 'Is there not a shorter way?' is the question Palmer poses and answers affirmatively; see, Phoebe Palmer, *The Way of Holiness, with notes by the way: being a narrative of religious experience*, First English ed. (London: Alexander Heylin, 1856. Reprinted from the thirty-fourth American ed., with preface by the Rev. Thomas Collins).
[286] Heath, 'The Quest for Holiness,' p. 401.
[287] Ibid., p. 398. For an account of her impact on the Booths, see, John Kent, *Holding the Fort: Studies in Victorian Revivalism* (London: Epworth Press, 1978), pp. 325-40.
[288] Walter Palmer, *Four Years in the Old World; comprising the travels ... and evangelistic labours of Dr. and Mrs. Palmer in England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. By the author of "Way to Holiness" ... [Mrs. P. Palmer].* (New York, 1866).

The influence of Fletcher

Phoebe Palmer was well known in Britain when she and her husband, Walter, arrived in 1859, thanks to the two-way flow of information that traversed the Atlantic and the publication in Britain of her seminal work, *The Way of Holiness*.[289] The Palmers' arrival coincided with the publication of Phoebe's latest book, *The Promise of the Father*, in which she claimed, on the basis of Joel 2:28-29 and Acts 2:17-18, that 'the full baptism of the Holy Ghost is… the rightful heritage of every believer,' describing her own experience of entire sanctification as the moment she received 'the promise of the Father.'[290] It is in *The Promise of the Father* that Palmer's indebtedness to Fletcher is clearly revealed.[291] Given that Fletcher's writings were widely published in nineteenth-century America, where they were read alongside those of Wesley, it is hardly surprising that Palmer was influenced by Fletcher, whose 'theology of Pentecostal sanctification' was embraced 'from the very beginning' by American Methodism.[292] By likening entire sanctification to the Pentecostal experience of the apostles, Fletcher contributed to its re-interpretation as an 'event', rather than a gradual process, and as the empowerment for Christian living rather than its goal.[293] This involved, as Dayton detects, 'a shift in exegetical foundations – from the

[289] Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America 1790-1865*, ed. David Bebbington, et al., Studies in Evangelical History and Thought. (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 1978), p. 182. And, Palmer, *The Way of Holiness*.

[290] *The Promise of the Father*, ed. Donald W. Dayton, "The Higher Christian Life": Sources for the Study of the Holiness, Pentecostal and Keswick Movements. (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1985), pp. 355, 204. Palmer's book is a robust defence of women's ministry based on Joel's prophecy that 'the tongue of fire' descends 'alike upon God's daughters as upon his sons.' ibid., p. 21.

[291] See, Harold E. Raser, 'Holding Tightly to the "Promise of the Father": Phoebe Palmer and the Legacy of the Fletchers of Madeley in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Methodism,' in *Religion, Gender and Industry: Exploring Church and Methodism in a Local Setting*, ed. Geordan Hammond and Peter S. Forsaith, (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co Ltd, 2011), pp. 178-9. Raser notes that 'for reasons that are not entirely clear' Palmer's use of Pentecostal imagery is less evident in her early career but is more pronounced from the 1850s. Ibid., p. 180.

[292] Laurence W. Wood, 'John Fletcher as the Theologian of Early American Methodism,' ibid., pp. 192-3, 204.

[293] Dayton, 'Methodism and Pentecostalism,' pp. 173-5.

predominantly Johannine sources of Wesley's doctrine to the Lukan (especially the Book of Acts) character of Fletcher's thought.'[294] This subtly shifted the emphasis on holiness as 'perfect love' expressed in Wesley's affectional and relational understanding to the more missional approach we find in Palmer, Arthur, and the revivalists, where '[H]oliness is power.'[295]

Holiness Revivalism

It was during the 1830s in America, when a heightened interest in entire sanctification took hold both within and beyond Methodism, that 'holiness revivalism' emerged.[296] It resonated with the Enlightenment idea of progress that fed the 'boundless optimism of the young nation,'[297] setting no limits on what was achievable whether for the individual, the fast-growing church, or the rapidly developing country. 'Entire sanctification was,' as Wakefield remarks, 'a kind of evangelical transcendentalism which thrived amid the optimism, the idealism and the moral earnestness which were so much a part of nineteenth century American character.'[298] It gave rise to the professional holiness revivalist, whose travelling ministry was geared to enabling as many as possible to enter into the experience through revival gatherings geared to that end. The first of significance to arrive in Britain was James Caughey in 1841. The

[294] Ibid., p. 174. See also Kay: 'Fletcher's exposition of Acts found crisis experiences in the lives of the original apostles that were not only sanctifying but also equipped them with power for Christian service. So, within the theological resources of Methodism, there were texts and commentaries that made room for an interpretation of sanctification that mapped it directly onto the apostolic experience described in the history of the early church.' William K. Kay, *Pentecostalism* (London: SCM Press, 2009), p. 27.
[295] Palmer, *The Way of Holiness*, p. 206.
[296] Both Charles Finney, the great American revivalist, and his colleague at Oberlin College, Ohio, Asa Mahan, though from the Reformed tradition, drew on Wesley and Fletcher in their espousal of Christian perfection, preparing the way for the emergence of a non-Wesleyan holiness movement not only in America but later in Britain, at the annual Keswick Convention. Dayton, 'Methodism and Pentecostalism,' p. 178.
[297] Ibid.
[298] Wakefield, *Methodist Spirituality*, p. 43.

results of his visit were impressive,[299] though he divided Wesleyan opinion with his flamboyant preaching, uncompromising advocacy of teetotalism, and invitation to receive the gift of entire sanctification in an instant, without the need for either gradual growth or the confirming witness of the Spirit – choosing to believe the promise was guarantee enough.[300]

A 'Shorter Way'

The most 'influential' American exponent of Pentecostal sanctification in 'the first half of the century' was Timothy Merritt,[301] a minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church,[302] who, in 1825, published selections from both Fletcher and Wesley in *The Christian's Manual; A Treatise on Christian Perfection, with Directions for Achieving that State*.[303] It was Merritt who helped Palmer's sister, Sarah Lankford, experience entire sanctification in 1835,[304] paving the way for Palmer herself to claim the gift on the evening of 26 July 1837.[305] Palmer went on to edit Merritt's influential periodical, *The Guide to Christian Perfection*, first published in 1839, re-branding it, *The Guide to Holiness*,[306] which, together with the 'Tuesday Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness'

[299] John Kent, 'The Wesleyan Methodists to 1849,' in *A History of The Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George, and Gordon Rupp, 2, (London: Epworth Press, 1978), pp. 223-4, 35.
[300] Bebbington, *Holiness in Nineteenth-Century England*, pp. 65-6. Kent, 'The Wesleyan Methodists to 1849,' pp. 223-4.
[301] Hempton, *Empire of the Spirit*, p. 85.
[302] The Methodist Episcopal Church was constituted on 24 December 1784 in Baltimore with Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury as superintendents; see, Cracknell and White, *An Introduction to World Methodism*, pp. 46-7.
[303] Priscilla Pope-Levison, 'Holiness Movements Within Methodism,' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to World Methodism*, ed. William Gibson, Peter Forsaith, and Martin Wellings, (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013), p. 143.
[304] See Duane V. Maxey, 'Timothy Merritt - Headlight of the Holiness Movement,' Holiness Data Ministry, http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyctr/books/2401-2500/HDM2409.pdf accessed 11 March 2016.
[305] Palmer, *The Way of Holiness*, p. 96.
[306] Pope-Levison, 'Holiness Movements Within Methodism,' p. 143.

that met at her New York home and 'continued in the care of Sarah and Phoebe for over sixty years,' helped establish and promulgate the holiness revivalist message.[307]

The essence of Palmer's teaching emerges from her anguished search for entire sanctification, detailed at length (in the third person) in *The Way of Holiness*. Palmer tells of the 'years of painful solicitude' spent seeking the gift yet failing 'to have an experience like most others… who are so fully able…to state the precise moment' of its reception.[308] Her ensuing 'spiritual depression' was only relieved when she 'determined… to take the BIBLE as her COUNSELLOR' rather than 'the experience of others.'[309] Palmer '*would take God at His word*, whatever her emotions might be,' and, drawing on Fletcher's graphic depiction of faith, 'lean…"with naked faith, upon a naked promise".'[310] This made all the difference: 'the Lord, through the medium of faith in His written word, led her astonished soul directly into the "way of holiness."'[311] Palmer had found her 'shorter way.' Entire sanctification was not an 'attainment beyond her reach,' as she had supposed, but 'a state of grace in which every one of the Lord's redeemed…should live.'[312] Palmer realised her error: she had been more concerned 'about *feeling* than *faith*,' failing to appreciate what she now experienced: '*feeling* [is] the *fruit* of faith.'[313] Only now did Palmer enter into 'what she loved to

[307] Nigel Scotland, *Apostles of the Spirit and Fire: American Revivalists and Victorian Britain*, ed. David Bebbington, et al., Studies in Evangelical History and Thought (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), p. 122.
[308] Palmer, *The Way of Holiness*, p. 50.
[309] Ibid., pp. 51-9.
[310] Ibid., pp. 19, 72. Raser, 'Holding Tightly to the "Promise of the Father",' p. 183.
[311] Palmer, *The Way of Holiness*, p. 11.
[312] Ibid., p. 15.
[313] Ibid., p. 19.

call… the "rest of faith"' (Hebrews 4:3), 'a phrase… often used in the early days of Keswick.'[314]

'Altar' Theology

Theologically, Palmer justified her 'shorter way' on the basis of the biblical understanding of sacrifice in both Old and New Testaments. According to Palmer's 'altar' theology, in the same way that sacrificial offerings, in the old dispensation, when placed on the altar became holy, because 'whatsoever touchest the altar shall be holy,' (Exodus 29:37), so in the new dispensation, Christians who, in an act of total consecration and trusting faith, place themselves as 'living sacrifices' (Romans 12:1) on the far superior altar – Christ himself (Hebrews 13:10) – are likewise made holy, because, as Jesus confirmed, it is 'The *altar* that sanctifieth the gift' (Matthew 23:19).[315] Relating this to her own experience of entire sanctification, Palmer records:

> It was thus, by "laying all upon this altar," she, by the most unequivocal Scripture testimony, laid herself under the most sacred obligation to *believe* that the sacrifice became "holy and acceptable," and virtually the *Lord's property*, even by virtue of the sanctity of the *altar* upon which it was laid, and continued "holy and acceptable," so long as kept inviolably upon this hallowed altar.[316]

And with that condition – continual consecration of the self – Palmer's 'shorter way' was just that: 'A WAY' of holiness, not just a momentary experience, yielding the fruit of holiness in a 'standard of Christian excellence' approximate 'to the image of Christ.'[317] Though this suggests a moral component in Palmer's holiness teaching,

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[314] Ibid., p. 36. Kent, *Holding the Fort*, p. 321. For an account of the annual Keswick Convention, first held in 1875, see Bebbington, *Holiness in Nineteenth-Century England*, pp. 73-90. Also, Ian M. Randall, *Evangelical Experiences: A Study in the Spirituality of English Evangelicalism 1918-1939*, Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999), pp. 14-45.
[315] Palmer, *The Way of Holiness*, pp. 42-3.
[316] Ibid., p. 43.
[317] Ibid., pp. 36-7.

teetotalism appeared to be its absolute measure.[318] It confirms, however, that Palmer did not exclude the notion of process, or as she put it 'interminable progression,' even though her emphasis fell on present attainment by appeal to Wesley: '"If you seek it by faith, seek it as *you are*; and if as you *are*, then expect it NOW!"'[319]

One final step, however, was necessary: testimony to the gift. Here Palmer follows Wesley, though is more emphatic. Citing Fletcher's admission that a failure to testify caused him to lose the blessing five times, she insists that 'God's gifts must be *diffused* or lost,'[320] for they are given to build up the body of Christ. The good news of entire sanctification has a public as well as private dimension, hence Palmer's insistence: 'Publish It, Tell It.'[321] To 'profess this blessing before thousands' became her vocation.[322]

Impact in Britain

Phoebe and Walter Palmer's British visit 'made a significant impact' on Wesleyan Methodism, especially 'on the lives of the 20,000 men and women' recorded as either justified (17,634) or sanctified (2,287).[323] Whilst revising these totals to 15,000 justified and 5,000 sanctified, Kent concludes that the Palmers failed to achieve the

[318] "The only ethical ideal which the American revivalists made to the content of 'holiness' was the doctrine of teetotalism, for whose growth in England they had more responsibility than is usually recognised." For Palmer it was 'part of her definition of faith' and a prerequisite to being entirely sanctified. Kent, *Holding the Fort*, pp. 318-19. 'The majority of American revivalists' believed that 'the human body was the temple of the Holy Spirit and anything that defiled it must be necessarily rejected.' Scotland, *Apostles of the Spirit and Fire*, p. 225.

[319] Phoebe Palmer, *Present to my Friend on Entire Devotion to God* (London: Alexander Heylin, 1857. New Edition, revised), p. 20. See also, Heath, 'The Quest for Holiness.' Wesley, 'The Scripture Way of Salvation,' III.18, *Works*, 2:169.

[320] Heath, 'The Quest for Holiness,' p. 410.

[321] Ibid.

[322] Palmer, *The Way of Holiness*, p. 27.

[323] Scotland, *Apostles of the Spirit and Fire*, p. 136. Kent, *Holding the Fort*, p. 324.

same level of numerical success that Caughey had achieved.[324] However, as Scotland states and Kent concedes, the Palmers' impact lay beyond statistics: 'encouraging many Methodist ministers and other evangelical clergy,' determining 'the form in which Holiness teaching reached the 1870s,' and advancing 'the temperance cause.'[325]

The visit of Robert and Hannah Pearsall Smith, culminating in the 1875 Brighton Convention for the Promotion of Scriptural Holiness, is evidence of the scale of Palmer's influence over the British scene. Exponents of Palmer's teaching, the Pearsall Smith's broadened its impact beyond Methodism through inter-denominational gatherings, establishing holiness revivalism among the 'pietistic middle-class,' and launching the Keswick Movement.[326] The unmistakeable influence of Palmer's 'altar' theology is clear in Robert Pearsall Smith's final appeal at Brighton, vividly illustrating the message and method of the revivalist:

> We do not come here to talk about the thing but to do it, and to live afterwards in the realization that it is an accomplished fact, a real transaction between us and God. When God asks you for your whole heart and you give it to Him, does He accept it? When your gift is laid upon the altar, does the altar sanctify the gift? There is but one answer.[327]

Here is the object of holiness revivalism writ large: a 'transaction' that brings the assurance of sanctification accomplished through an act of faith, facilitated by a skilled revivalist in an environment of emotional expectation designed to effect it. That is not to question the sincerity of those who placed their all on the altar and claimed the blessing, nor to question the validity of its lasting impact upon them. It does reveal, however, the disparity between the methods of the revivalists and the early

[324] *Holding the Fort*, p. 324.
[325] Ibid. Scotland, *Apostles of the Spirit and Fire*, p. 136.
[326] Kent, *Holding the Fort*, pp. 298, 316.
[327] Ibid., p. 347.

Methodists, whose pursuit of perfection was formational, conducted over time in their local societies, in the bands and classes, in attending to the means of grace, and where even claims to perfection generally occurred at the love-feast or in the intimate fellowship of the small group.

As to the nature of the holy life promoted by the revivalists, the Convention revealed 'how instinctively the evangelical pietist translated "holiness" in terms of…inherited moral attitudes,' with the emphasis falling on teetotalism.[328] In this respect Palmer and the revivalists achieved success, changing Wesleyan attitudes so that by 1875 'temperance was a normal part of the Methodist "mind- set"' and '"drink" became a consistent symbol of all that prevented not only respectability but responsibility.'[329] As Methodism flourished in the nineteenth century, giving the appearance of missional advance, its growing sense of respectability restricted its vision of holiness, causing it to distance itself from the very society that it was called to transform. It was, as Martin Wellings vividly states, a 'triumph of respectability over redemption.'[330]

Reflections

Phoebe Palmer was a remarkable woman of profound spiritual integrity, through whose ministry as many as 25,000 persons claimed the gift of entire sanctification.[331] Viewing holiness as the 'cardinal doctrine of Methodism' Palmer saw herself as a loyal interpreter of Wesley, pleading in *Economy of Salvation* (1866) that readers 'listen to

[328] Ibid., p. 348.
[329] John Munsey Turner, 'Victorian Values - or whatever happened to John Wesley's Scriptural Holiness?,' *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 46, no. 6 (1988): p. 179. Both the Primitive Methodists and the Methodist New Connection had earlier accepted teetotalism. Ibid.
[330] Wellings. ''What is our calling's glorious hope?' The expectation and expression of holiness in Methodism,' p. 13.
[331] For the number of claimants see, Charles Edwin Jones, 'The Inverted Shadow of Phoebe Palmer,' *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 31, no. 2 (1996): p. 120.

important truths from him who, under God, was the founder of Methodism.'[332] But though Wesley's doctrine had captured her imagination, and all her energies were devoted to its promotion, Palmer altered Wesley's finely tuned balance between gradual growth and instantaneous gift in favour of the latter.[333]

Though Palmer's 'shorter way' and her motto, 'believe that you have it and you have it,'[334] have been sharply criticized as a distortion of Wesley's doctrine, and likened to Bonhoeffer's 'cheap grace,' dispensing sanctification so that 'spiritually fruitless believers…claim a spiritual perfection they do not possess,' this is going too far, as Heath argues in her rehabilitation of Palmer as a 'distinctly Methodist' missional leader with apophatic mystical tendencies in which 'affective religious experience' is de-emphasised.[335] Whether or not Palmer had apophatic mystical tendencies, her 'shorter way' provided the much desired assurance of sanctification to many, like herself, 'in the second and third generations [after Wesley] who believed themselves incapable of realizing, in the same manner as their parents, the witness of the Holy Spirit that they had been made perfect in love.'[336] In this, Palmer increasingly suited the spirit of the times, not only in its Enlightenment optimism and logical reasoning, but in the way she urged believers to 'lay all on the altar' in an immediate and decisive act that reflected the melodramatic literature of the period: 'in Romantic fashion, a

[332] Randall J. Stephens, 'The holiness / pentecostal / charismatic extension of the Wesleyan tradition,' in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 266.
[333] 'Is there not a shorter way?' is the question Palmer poses and answers affirmatively; see, Palmer, *The Way of Holiness*.
[334] Stephens, 'The holiness / pentecostal / charismatic extension of the Wesleyan tradition,' p. 266.
[335] Heath, 'The Quest for Holiness,' pp. 411, 398-9.
[336] Jones, 'The Inverted Shadow of Phoebe Palmer,' p. 124. Kent concurs: many "did not seem able to attain the kind of subjective experience which they could interpret as evidence that 'holiness' had been given them." Kent, *Holding the Fort*, p. 320.

matter of will rather than experience.'[337] As such, it strayed from Wesley's empirical approach in which the witness of the Spirit, not the faith of the believer, provided evidence of the gift's reception.[338]

Palmer diverged from Wesley in placing sanctification at 'the beginning, not the end of the journey of holiness.'[339] She followed Fletcher, interpreting entire sanctification, in Pentecostal terms, as empowerment for mission, and promoting its immediate reception through her 'shorter way.' Describing a revival meeting in 1858, 'Palmer rhapsodized: "the scene we witnessed could not have been greatly unlike that witnessed on the day of Pentecost."'[340] It was this instantaneous dimension of her teaching, rather than her more nuanced theology, that became her legacy, and was popularized in the holiness revivalism that proved so influential in determining the interpretation of the tradition in British Methodism.

3.2 Samuel Chadwick

When, in June 1885, the twenty-four-year-old Samuel Chadwick (1860-1932), a first-year ministerial student at the Wesleyan Theological Institution at Didsbury, Manchester, attended the first annual Southport Methodist Holiness Convention he could not have anticipated its lasting significance.[341] Not only would he serve as Chair of the Convention (1913-32),[342] but he would join two of the Convention speakers,

[337] David W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody*, ed. David W. Bebbington and Mark A. Noll, vol. 3, A History of Evangelicalism: People, Movements and Ideas in the English-Speaking World (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), p. 190. And *Victorian Religious Revivals*, p. 12.
[338] *The Dominance of Evangelicalism*, p. 191.
[339] Heath, 'The Quest for Holiness,' p. 402.
[340] Stephens, 'The holiness / pentecostal / charismatic extension of the Wesleyan tradition,' p. 267.
[341] Norman G. Dunning, *Samuel Chadwick* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1933), pp. 223-27.
[342] Ibid.

Thomas Champness and Thomas Cook,[343] in ensuring that, alongside the Convention, what began under Champness as the *Joyful News* Training Home and Mission and continued under Cook as Cliff College, became, during his time as Principal (1912-32), the bastion of Wesleyan holiness teaching within British Methodism,[344] interpreted in the Pentecostal form that was the legacy of Palmer and the holiness revivalists, as evidenced by his 'oft-repeated' remark: 'The College stands for full salvation, for at the back of all the evangelist's equipment there is Pentecost.'[345]

'My Pentecost'

Chadwick experienced what he called 'my Pentecost' in 1882.[346] Inspired to read Arthur's *Tongue of Fire* five years earlier by a sermon on Pentecost by W. W. Walton, it was not until he experienced a 'sense of failure' as a lay evangelist at Stacksteads that his 'interest in the doctrine of Scriptural Holiness' was awakened by the testimony of Rev. John Denholm Brash, himself influenced by Palmer.[347] An intense period of reading, Bible study, and prayer culminated at 3am one Sunday morning in 'a very definite experience of full salvation' with Chadwick burning his entire collection of

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[343] J. Baines Atkinson, ed. *To the Uttermost: Commemorating the Diamond Jubilee of the Southport Methodist Holiness Convention, 1885-1945* (London: Epworth Press, 1945), p. 15.

[344] The founding purpose of the *Joyful News* Home/Cliff College was the training of lay evangelists. Joseph Isaac Brice, *The Crowd for Christ. [A study of the evangelistic work of Thomas Champness, Thomas Cook and others, with special reference to Cliff College.]* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1934). Thomas D. Meadley, *Kindled by a spark: the story of Thomas Champness* (Ilkeston: Cliff College / Moorleys, 1983), pp. 23-34. Henry Thomas Smart, *The Life of Thomas Cook, Evangelist and first Principal of Cliff College, Calver.* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1913). Dunning, *Samuel Chadwick*, pp. 106-209. G. Howard Mellor, 'The development of mission theology and praxis at Cliff College, with reference to its antecedents and history' (PhD, University of Durham, 2005), pp. 2-107. Randall, *Evangelical Experiences*, pp. 77-109. Strawson, 'Methodist Theology 1850-1950,' pp. 227-29. Wakefield, *Methodist Spirituality*, pp. 59-60.

[345] Brice, *The Crowd for Christ*, p. 89.

[346] Ibid., p. 111. Samuel Chadwick, *The Testament of Samuel Chadwick, 1860-1932. Compiled by D. W. Lambert* (London: Epworth Press, 1957), pp. 76-8.

[347] Brice, *The Crowd for Christ*, p. 111. Chadwick, *Testament*, pp. 76-8. Dunning, *Samuel Chadwick*, pp. 50-1. Despite being warned by his father, 'Trust not in the Palmers or such crew,' Rev. John Denholm Brash confirmed, 'I was brought to God by Mrs Palmer, and ever since then *I have been haunted and hunted by the question of Holiness.*' (his italics) William Bardsley Brash, *Love and Life: The story of J. Denholm Brash* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1913), pp. 29, 111.

fifteen sermons, surrendering himself to God, and receiving what he described as 'a baptism that energized my life with power,' 'made me an evangelist,' and saw 'seven people…converted' that day.[348] Chadwick had discovered that 'The gift of the Spirit is God's gift of power, for effective witnessing, holiness of life, and consecrated service.'[349] Variously 'known as the Pentecostal Gift of the Spirit,…Entire Sanctification, Christian Perfection, and Perfect Love,'[350] it remained axiomatic for Chadwick that the 'Blessing' he received that night marked the beginning, not the goal, of an effective Christian life, viewed in Pentecostal terms as empowerment for mission. It was a necessary 'coming of age,'[351] 'a Second Blessing, receivable in a moment and receivable now by simple faith,'[352] the promotion of which became his life's work, believing as he did that without this 'fullness of the Spirit' empowering God's people the 'Church can never save the world or fulfil the mission of Christ.'[353]

The King's Highway, *Joyful News*, and Southport

Chadwick's experience of entire sanctification was set in the context of a resurgence of interest in Wesley's doctrine – already underway prior to the Pearsall Smith visit – that owed much to the launch in 1872 of *The King's Highway*, a magazine that exerted a 'profound influence on the thinking of Wesleyan Methodists' during its twenty-eight years of publication.[354] Its 'single purpose,' according to editors, John Brash and Isaac

[348] Chadwick, *Testament*, p. 76. Dunning, *Samuel Chadwick*, pp. 50-1. Brice, *The Crowd for Christ*, p. 111.
[349] Samuel Chadwick, *The Way to Pentecost* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1932), p. 65.
[350] Ibid., p. 124.
[351] Dunning, *Samuel Chadwick*, p. 225.
[352] Brice, *The Crowd for Christ*, p. 117.
[353] Chadwick, *The Way to Pentecost*, p. 19.
[354] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, pp. 154-5. G. Howard Mellor, 'Samuel Chadwick: Energised by the Holy Spirit,' The Annual Samuel Chadwick Lecture 2018, Cliff College, https://www.cliffcollege.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/SC-Energised-by-the-HS-Final.pdf accessed 15 April 2019. Footnote 44, p. 15.

Page, was 'the promotion of belief in the doctrine and attainment of the experience and life of Scriptural holiness,' by which they meant 'complete deliverance from sin' accomplished by 'the Holy Spirit' and 'realized through simple faith.'[355]

Chadwick's 'Pentecost' also coincided with a highpoint in Wesleyan revival missions, during which both Thomas Champness and the newly-appointed connexional evangelist, Thomas Cook, enjoyed enormous success, with Cook's converts numbering thousands.[356] Cook believed that preaching sanctification was key to revival and held holiness meetings at all his missions.[357] It was following a successful mission at Southport that Cook and local minister Rev. W. H. Tindall, who had received the blessing at Keswick, launched the first Southport Convention in 1885.[358] Cook's teaching was subsequently set out in *New Testament Holiness*, which 'sold in tens of thousands,' becoming for many years the 'classic interpretation' of the doctrine.[359] Meanwhile in February 1883, Champness, helped by his wife, Eliza, published the first issue of *Joyful News* to encourage effective evangelism and promote holiness, achieving 'a circulation of thirty thousand' within weeks.[360] Chadwick subscribed from the start, reporting its first convert in the third issue, and eventually becoming editor in 1905.[361] In 1884, Champness began training evangelists, the beginnings of what, in

[355] Isaac E. Page, ed. *John Brash: Memorials and correspondence* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1912), pp. 148-49.
[356] Brice, *The Crowd for Christ*, p. 26.
[357] Ibid., pp. 57-8.
[358] Atkinson, *To the Uttermost*, p. 15. Randall, *Evangelical Experiences*, p. 78. Page, *John Brash*, p. 215.
[359] Thomas Cook, *New Testament Holiness* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1902). Brice, *The Crowd for Christ*, p. 57.
[360] *The Crowd for Christ*, pp. 32-3. Meadley, *Kindled by a spark*, pp. 7, 24. In 1897, Champness published *Plain Talks on Christian Perfection*, a compilation of articles that first appeared in *Joyful News*. Strawson, 'Methodist Theology 1850-1950,' p. 227.
[361] Brice, *The Crowd for Christ*, p. 31. Meadley, *Kindled by a spark*, p. 42.

1889, became the *Joyful News* Training Home and Mission, the precursor of Cliff College.[362]

Cliff College

On his retirement in 1903, Champness handed over the Training Home to the Wesleyan Home Mission Department, and to Thomas Cook, who oversaw its relocation to Cliff College in 1904.[363] Chadwick preached at the opening and, from the outset, gave weekly 'Bible lectures,' prior to joining the staff as Resident Tutor in 1907.[364] On the untimely death of Cook in 1912, Chadwick was appointed Principal,[365] prompting his frequent remark,

> I was born for Cliff, saved for Cliff, sanctified for Cliff, and all through the years of my ministry was being prepared for Cliff. My title to this service is my devotion to that for which Thomas Cook and Thomas Champness lived and died.[366]

For the next twenty years Chadwick determined the educational priorities at Cliff. 'Learning is not the chief thing,' he declared, 'scarcely a man comes that does not get his Pentecost.'[367] He believed that the College had 'failed' any student who left without it.[368] In October 1920, after Chadwick had spoken about 'the difference that my Pentecost made to me,' so many students experienced the blessing that normal college routine was suspended for 'several days.'[369] This continued to infuse the ethos of Cliff long after Chadwick: students expected 'that they would have an experience of the second blessing and that it would come soon in the college year.'[370] In this way,

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[362] Mellor, 'Mission Theology and Praxis at Cliff College,' pp. 23-6.
[363] Ibid., pp. 31-2.
[364] Ibid., pp. 18-35. Dunning, *Samuel Chadwick*, pp. 106-07.
[365] *Samuel Chadwick*, pp. 130-32.
[366] Brice, *The Crowd for Christ*, p. 76.
[367] Mellor, 'Mission Theology and Praxis at Cliff College,' p 88.
[368] Brice, *The Crowd for Christ*, p. 109.
[369] Ibid., pp. 111-12.
[370] Mellor, 'Mission Theology and Praxis at Cliff College,' p. 95.

Chadwick, whose name became synonymous with the College, helped secure Pentecostal 'second blessing' holiness as the dominant interpretation of the tradition at Cliff and Southport in the first half of the twentieth century.

Restating perfection

Chadwick maintained that Wesley's doctrine was in need of 'restatement,' not only because he regarded it as 'incomplete,' and neglected by Methodists, but because 'a new birth for the new age' was demanded.[371] The challenge lay in the 'ambiguity' of the word 'perfection,' which Chadwick sought to redress by distinguishing between two Greek words used to depict it: 'teleios,' denoting 'final' perfection in 'glory,' and 'katartizo,' the perfection that is both 'commanded and promised' in this life.'[372] On the basis of Matthew 4:21, where 'katartizo' refers to the 'mending' of nets, making them 'fit for their purpose,' Chadwick defined Christian perfection in terms of 'fitness' for God's purposes.[373] This accorded with his Pentecostal theology of sanctification, whereby 'Christ is not imitated, but reproduced' in us:

> The Spirit of God does not work upon us; He lives in us… the Spirit of Holiness makes the heart clean, the mind true, the faculties fit, and the life fruitful, by making His holiness ours.[374]

This is the 'miracle of Pentecost,'[375] on the basis of which Chadwick ruled out 'slow and insensible growth in grace,' claiming instead that Wesley 'preached [perfection] as an immediate, instantaneous, assured work of grace through faith,' and used the term 'second blessing.'[376] Whilst Chadwick recognised that it was 'easier to prove the

[371] Samuel Chadwick, *The Call to Christian Perfection* (London: Epworth Press, 1936), pp. 24-5.
[372] Ibid., pp. 29-32.
[373] Ibid., pp. 31-2. Samuel Chadwick, *Humanity and God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1904), p. 252.
[374] *The Way to Pentecost*, p. 88.
[375] *Humanity and God*, p. 189.
[376] *The Call to Christian Perfection*, pp. 44, 64.

doctrine of a Second Blessing from John Wesley, than from the Bible,'[377] he was quick to draw attention to the fact that William Burt Pope, his tutor at Didsbury and Methodism's 'outstanding systematic theologian in the nineteenth century,'[378] had subsequently retracted his initial repudiation of the term in his theology of 'progressive sanctification.'[379] This enabled Chadwick to maintain, contrary to what he regarded as a Darwinian 'fascination with 'evolution in the spiritual life,' that holiness 'never comes by growth,' but 'involves a crisis, an acceptance, and a confession.'[380]

The 'eradication' debate

The burgeoning interest in holiness teaching in the late Victorian era that set the context for Chadwick's interpretation owed much to the cultural shift from Enlightenment rationalism to Romantic sensibilities, prompting more nuanced expressions of holiness and accounting for differences that emerged between exponents.[381] The Keswick movement was influenced by Romantic ideas, as too were some Wesleyans, including *King's Highway* editor, John Brash, a regular speaker at Keswick,[382] who exemplified the Romantic shift from 'the specific to the indefinite, from the mechanical to the organic.'[383] This is particularly evident in relation to the concept of sinlessness and the terminology of 'eradication.'[384] Brash disliked the term,

[377] Ibid., p. 68.
[378] Strawson, 'Methodist Theology 1850-1950,' p. 185.
[379] William Burt Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology: Being Analytical Outlines of a Course of Theological Study, Biblical, Dogmatic, Historical*, 2nd ed., vol. 3 (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1879), pp 36-44. Pope had stated 'Never do we read of… a SECOND BLESSING that is more than the unrestrained outpouring of the same Spirit who gave the first.' ibid., p. 44. For his retraction, see Chadwick, *The Call to Christian Perfection*, p. 65.
[380] *The Call to Christian Perfection*, pp. 25-6, 62-4, 89. See also, *The Way to Pentecost*, pp. 86-7.
[381] See Bebbington, *Holiness in Nineteenth-Century England*, pp 68-72.
[382] Page, *John Brash*, p. 106.
[383] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 172.
[384] Wesley's references to the destruction or rooting out of sin helped create the difficulty, as in his description of sanctification as the moment when 'the evil root, the carnal mind, is destroyed, and inbred sin subsists no more. Wesley, Sermon 14, 'The Repentance of Believers,' I.20 in *Works*, 1:346.

believing it had 'no correspondence to anything the Spirit does in a human heart.'[385] Champness maintained that eradication was unscriptural and led to misunderstanding, returning to the idea of 'growth, not a leap' as the essence of Wesley's doctrine.[386] By contrast, Cook firmly advocated eradication, distinguishing between the act and state of sin, viewing the latter as 'a sort of microbe' to be destroyed.[387] Likewise, Chadwick distinguished between Southport, standing 'for the doctrine of *eradication* of inbred sin and *imparted* holiness, as against the Keswick teaching of *repression* of sin and *imputed* holiness,'[388] which he regarded as 'sheer make-believe,' implying that God accepts 'a fiction for a fact.'[389]

In advocating eradication, Chadwick drew solid support from William Burt Pope, whose *Compendium of Christian Theology* he preached through at Leeds:[390]

> Sanctification in its beginnings, process, and final issues, is the full eradication of the sin itself, which reigning in the unregenerate co-exists with the new life in the regenerate, is abolished in the wholly sanctified.[391]

Although Chadwick could not have had a more reliable ally, Pope was unable to grasp the vital role of the affections in Wesley's understanding of holiness, mistakenly claiming that Wesley 'failed not to look deeper in the heart than the region of its affections,' and deriving his interpretation of Christian perfection from the hymns that call for 'the destruction of inbred sin.'[392] By advocating such a literal and mechanistic view of the terminology of 'eradication' and 'destruction,' and neglecting Wesley's

[385] Page, *John Brash*, p. 33.
[386] Mellor, 'Mission Theology and Praxis at Cliff College,' pp. 67, 72.
[387] Cook, *New Testament Holiness*, pp. 28-9. Smart, *The Life of Thomas Cook*, p. 281.
[388] Dunning, *Samuel Chadwick*, p. 148.
[389] Chadwick, *The Call to Christian Perfection*, p. 76.
[390] Dunning, *Samuel Chadwick*, pp. 60, 81.
[391] Chadwick, *The Call to Christian Perfection*, p. 59.
[392] Pope, *Compendium of Christian Theology*, p 97.

affectional approach, Pope , Cook, and Chadwick placed themselves out of step with the Romantic currents of the time, and the richer understanding of human personality developing within the social sciences. As Bebbington remarks, by tolerating 'the eradicationism that Keswick ruled out of court,' Anglican dominance in the mainstream of the holiness movement was assured.'[393]

Reflections

From humble beginnings and largely self-taught, Samuel Chadwick enjoyed a remarkable ministry, both in circuit and at Cliff College. As a circuit minister, he brought revival and growth wherever he went, most notably at Leeds, where he served for sixteen years prior to his appointment at Cliff.[394] Chadwick's personal 'Pentecost' at Stacksteads had certainly empowered his ministry; it is not surprising, therefore, that 'Pentecost' became the 'motif for his views on Wesleyan Holiness,'[395] nor that he was 'dedicated to establishing the connection between the baptism of the Spirit, sanctification and revival,'[396] consolidating this teaching at Cliff and Southport.

John Wesley, however, did not make the connection between Christian perfection and the baptism of the Holy Spirit;[397] that was made by Fletcher, and further developed within American holiness revivalism. Neither did Wesley view Christian perfection as empowerment for mission; he did not claim it for himself, nor were there many claimants during his lifetime, yet early Methodism developed and flourished. Perfection for Wesley was not a means to an end, but the end itself. It was to be

[393] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 178.
[394] Dunning, *Samuel Chadwick*, pp. 63-105.
[395] Mellor, 'Samuel Chadwick' p. 18.
[396] Randall, *Evangelical Experiences*, p. 79.
[397] Ibid., p. 77.

pursued because it reflected God's purposes of love for human beings: the recovery of the divine image and friendship with God. It was understood by Wesley as a gradual process of growth through active participation in all the means of grace, with an awareness of the sufficiency of God's grace to meet the desire of the human heart for this ultimate gift at any point along the way.

Chadwick's Pentecostal interpretation represents the outcome of what Bebbington describes as the nineteenth-century 'reworking of the tradition,' assisted by the cultural shift from Enlightenment to Romantic ideals, in which 'sanctification is not a terminus but a departure.'[398] This, as Wakefield states, 'seriously upset the balance of [Wesley's] true teaching which in its dependence on the spirituality of the great masters of the Eastern and Western Church, understands holiness much more in terms of the growth of an organism,' and not, as Macarius the Egyptian remarked, 'Off with one coat and on with another.'[399] Add to this Chadwick's adherence to the notion of 'eradication' of sin, and the loss of the formational aspect of Wesley's teaching is compounded because the gradual reshaping of our disordered affections is not seen to address the core problem, evidence of the difficulties Wesley's successors had in interpreting the tradition once they abandoned his habituated affectional moral psychology, as Maddox argues.[400]

Samuel Chadwick's ministry spanned the period in which interest in the Wesleyan holiness tradition reached its peak in the last decades of the nineteenth century before

[398] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, pp. 172-3.
[399] Wakefield, *Methodist Spirituality*, p. 43.
[400] Randy L. Maddox, 'Holiness of Heart and Life: Lessons from North American Methodism,' *Asbury Theological Journal* 51, no. 1 (1996): p. 152.

entering its slow demise in the inter-war years, prompting him to speak, in 1928, of 'Methodism's glory having departed through the loss of a holiness proclamation.'[401] It coincided with the period when "the predominant response to 'modern thought' transposed Methodist evangelicalism into a broadly liberal evangelical key."[402] For all its remaining populist appeal, particularly in the north, Chadwick was painfully aware that the holiness teaching of Southport and Cliff was becoming increasingly 'detached, isolated and distinct in the Methodist Church,'[403] and viewed 'as the poor relation of official Methodist orthodoxy.'[404] With Chadwick's death in 1932, shortly after Methodist Union, that teaching had lost one of its most powerful and influential advocates, and with numbers beginning to fall at Southport in the 1930s 'Cliff and Southport to some extent conveyed a picture of a lonely school of prophets at odds with Methodist progressiveness.'[405]

3.3 Hugh Price Hughes

Following his appointment as Connexional Evangelist by the Wesleyan Conference of 1883, alongside Thomas Cook, appointed the previous year, Rev. Hugh Price Hughes had hardly begun his year of highly successful revival missions across Britain, when an anonymous pamphlet appeared that, according to Katherine, his wife, 'stirred [him] to the very depth of his being,' transforming not only his future ministry and subsequent direction of the Methodist Church, but also Hughes's understanding of holiness, hereafter envisioned in societal as well as individual terms.[406] *The Bitter Cry of Outcast*

[401] Randall, *Evangelical Experiences*, p. 94.
[402] Martin Wellings, *Evangelicals in Methodism: mainstream, marginal or misunderstood?*, Headline Special (Ilkeston, Derbyshire: Moorley's Print & Publishing, on behalf of Headway, 2005), p. 38.
[403] Cited in Randall, *Evangelical Experiences*, p 81.
[404] Strawson, 'Methodist Theology 1850-1950,' p. 225.
[405] Randall, *Evangelical Experiences*, p. 81.
[406] Christopher Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes: Founder of a new Methodism, Conscience of a new Nonconformity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), pp. 102-3, 07-8.

London, subsequently revealed to be the work of Congregational minister, Andrew Mearns, drew attention to the appalling slum conditions in which 'no form of vice or sensuality causes surprise or attracts attention,' alerting Hughes to the way in which economic deprivation is an impediment to salvation and to the ever-widening 'gulf…separating the lowest classes of the community from our churches and chapels, and from all decency and civilisation.'[407] 'We realised,' wrote Hughes,' 'that we were partly responsible for the existing sin and misery of London, and that we must do our share in the great work which demands the united devotion of all the Churches.'[408]

The outcome of Hughes's impassioned and energetic endeavours included the pioneering work of the West London Mission, established in 1887 as the 'centrepiece' of the new 'Forward Movement,'[409] described by Turner as 'the last great attempt to reach those alienated from all the churches,'[410] the launch of the *Methodist Times*, a progressive newspaper providing a platform for Hughes's views as editor,[411] the inauguration of the Free Church Council with Hughes as its first President,[412] and an unprecedented level of political influence and engagement, resulting in the term 'Nonconformist Conscience' being sneeringly applied, yet welcomed by Hughes on behalf of the Free Churches.[413] According to his latest biographer, Hughes was 'one of

[407] Ibid., pp. 107-11. Philip S. Bagwell, *Outcast London: A Christian Response: The West London Mission of the Methodist Church 1887-1987* (London: Epworth Press, 1987), pp. 2-3.
[408] Arthur Walters, *Hugh Price Hughes: Pioneer and Reformer*, ed. John Telford, Library of Methodist Biography (London: Robert Culley, 1907), p. 67.
[409] Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes*, p. 143.
[410] John Munsey Turner, 'Methodism in England 1900-1932,' in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. Rupert Davies; A. Raymond George; Gordon Rupp, 3, (London: Epworth Press, 1983), p. 311.
[411] Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes*, pp. 120-26.
[412] Ibid., pp. 272-88.
[413] Maldwyn Edwards, *Methodism and England: A Study of Methodism in its Social and Political Aspects during the Period 1850-1932* (London: The Epworth Press, 1943), p. 159.

the makers of modern Britain' who 'understood the social imperative of Christianity in a truly Wesleyan sense, namely as an expression of personal entire sanctification.'[414]

Revivalist and Social Reformer

Hughes's unique gifts as both evangelist and social reformer first became evident on his appointment to the Dover circuit in 1869. At Richmond College, Hughes had regarded 'culture and learning' as the necessary prerequisites for effective ministry and looked askance at advocates of revivalism and temperance.[415] This dramatically changed when Hughes arrived in Dover. His first sermon saw eighteen persons publicly respond at a church unused to such happenings, marking the beginning of Hughes's 'career as Evangelistic Preacher.'[416] Likewise, his encounter with 'real life' at Dover led Hughes to become a 'total abstainer for the sake of others,' as he later explained, and to his leadership within the temperance movement.[417] Hughes also became a staunch advocate for Josephine Butler's social purity movement and its campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, viewed as facilitating prostitution and degrading women.[418] The direction of Hughes's ministry was set: a '*passion for souls*'[419] combined with a Christian ethic expressed in social and political action.

A move to Brighton in 1872 gave Hughes reason to be grateful to American holiness revivalism, having been left dispirited and depressed after the Liberal election defeat

[414] Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes*, pp. 336-7.
[415] Ibid., p. 20. Arthur Walters, *Hugh Price Hughes*, Little Books of the Kindly Light, no. 54 (London: Epworth Press, 1939), pp. 5-6.
[416] Dorothea Price Hughes, *The Life of Hugh Price Hughes* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1904), pp. 71-2. Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes*, pp. 29-30.
[417] *Hugh Price Hughes*, pp. 31-5.
[418] Ibid., pp. 35-40.
[419] Walters, *Hughes: Pioneer and Reformer*, p. 15.

of 1874. This appeared to render fruitless the 'educational, political, and temperance activities' in which Hughes had immersed himself, leading him to question his leadership skills and vocation.[420] Attending the Brighton Convention, Hughes was deeply affected by the holiness preaching of the Pearsall Smiths, particularly the idea 'that "entire sanctification" was based on "entire surrender,"' challenging him to consider whether there was yet a 'deeper' surrender to be made – that of unvoiced ambition.[421] According to friend and biographer, Gregory Mantle, Hughes responded by making a 'full surrender.'[422] The experience revitalised his ministry, establishing Hughes as both revivalist preacher and social reformer.

Social Christianity

The opening of the West London Mission on 21st October 1887 provided Hughes with the platform to promote his views on the social implications of Christianity in sermons delivered at Sunday afternoon 'conferences' at St. James' Hall, Piccadilly.[423] The sermons were subsequently published in four volumes: *Social Christianity* (1889), *The Philanthropy of God* (1889), *Ethical Christianity* (1892), and *Essential Christianity* (1894). In *Social Christianity*, described by Maldwyn Edwards, as 'a landmark in Methodist history,'[424] Hughes attributes the alienation from Christianity experienced by so many to the way 'We have practically neglected the fact that Christ came to save the Nation as well as the Individual, and that it is an essential feature of His mission to reconstruct human society on a basis of Justice and Love.'[425] This signalled, as

[420] Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes*, pp. 60-1.
[421] Hughes, *The Life of Hugh Price Hughes*, pp. 105-6.
[422] Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes*, p. 63.
[423] Ibid., pp. 22, 105-6, 71.
[424] Edwards, *Methodism and England*, p. 155.
[425] Hugh Price Hughes, *Social Christianity: Sermons delivered in St. James's Hall, London* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1889), p. viii.

Oldstone-Moore remarks, 'the transformation of Methodist evangelicalism into a social gospel,'[426] with Hughes 'its leading Methodist exponent,'[427] proclaiming 'Christ the greatest of social reformers.'[428] In this Hughes shared the ideals of other 'social gospellers… trying to do no less than Christianize society as a whole.'[429]

As a notable revivalist, Hughes was a 'key speaker at the first Southport Convention,'[430] but it was the lack of social engagement that he encountered among the devotees of holiness that led him to distance himself from the movement.[431] '[H]oliness meant to him anything but that other worldliness of which George Eliot had accused Nonconformity, a criticism which rankled and to which he often made reference.'[432] Hughes never let his enthusiasm for social righteousness, however, diminish the fundamental importance he attached to bringing people to Christ, which he did at the Sunday evening services, where week by week people made their way into the inquiry rooms to make a first commitment or a deeper consecration.[433] 'Without such services,' his daughter stated, 'my father himself would never have consented to uphold the rest of the Mission, for that would have been to deny both his own calling and his own conception of the Christian religion.'[434] His invitation was

[426] Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes*, p. 173.
[427] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 212.
[428] The title of Hughes's sermon on 27th November 1887 at St. James Hall. Hughes, *Social Christianity*, p. 53.
[429] The Social Gospel movement was a response to the 'ills of urban-industrial society,' envisioned by the theology of Albrecht Ritschl, with Bishop Westcott its most active Anglican exponent. See Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism*, pp. 230-4.
[430] Wellings. ''What is our calling's glorious hope?' The expectation and expression of holiness in Methodism,' p. 15.
[431] Henry D. Rack, 'Wesleyan Methodism 1849-1902,' in *A History of The Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George, and Gordon Rupp, 3, (London: Epworth Press, 1983), pp. 162-3.
[432] Hughes, *The Life of Hugh Price Hughes*, p. 249.
[433] Ibid., pp. 223-6.
[434] Ibid., p. 226.

always to make the step that he had made as both a teenager and again at Brighton: 'submit to God in Christ.'[435]

Christ-like Christianity

'The whole ethical object of Christianity is summed up in the phrase "Christ-like life,"' declared Hughes in *Essential Christianity*,[436] providing the key to his practical understanding of Wesley's doctrine, and avoiding the terminology of the holiness movement which hardly features in the sermons.[437] This was to be realised through a personal union with Christ issuing in Christ-like service of others, and in *Ethical Christianity* he challenged his hearers accordingly.

> What we want above everything is a few Christ-like Christians… John Wesley expressed the same great truth in memorable words when he said, "Ten true Christians would change the face of England." …Will you be one of the ten?... Will you so give yourself up to Christ, that His spirit may reproduce in you the Christ-like "extra" – that disinterested, absolute, self-sacrificing, suffering, all-embracing love, which is the highest attribute of God, and the distinctive mark of the Christianity of Christ?[438]

Directing his appeal to Christians who 'are ready for the further and fuller consecration, for the higher and better life,' and employing holiness revivalist language, including the plea to 'accept it now,' Hughes transposes an already transposed tradition into one that is centred on the transformation of a hurting society, not the personal blessing of the individual. 'Your great work, O Christian, is not to save your own soul, but to overcome the world as Christ overcame it: to

[435] Ibid., p. 223.
[436] Hugh Price Hughes, *Essential Christianity: a series of explanatory sermons* (London: Isbister & Co, 1894), p. 82.
[437] For example, there are 18 references to 'Christ-like' in *Ethical Christianity* but none of 'holy,' 'holiness,' 'sanctification,' or 'second blessing.'
[438] Hugh Price Hughes, *Ethical Christianity: A Series of Sermons* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1892), p. 15.

overcome by loving it, and ultimately saving it.'[439] This, Hughes insists, is ultimately the work of Christ, though it requires our active cooperation: 'Christ-like men and women can be produced only by Christ; and He Himself can produce them only by entering into living union with such men and women as are willing to receive the Christ-like life from Him.'[440]

Pentecostal Blessing

'Who is ready to become a Christlike Christian?' asks Hughes at the end of his sermon on 'The Social Gospel of Joel' in *Essential Christianity*.[441] 'Two qualifications are necessary: 'personal conversion… leading to a real, absolute, unconditional, whole-hearted self-surrender to Christ,' and 'the "Pentecostal Baptism" of the Holy Spirit.'[442] This suggests that Hughes accepts the 'orthodoxy' of the holiness movement, but his exegesis of the texts of both this (Joel 3:17) and his previous sermon, 'The Pentecostal Blessing' (Joel 2:28, 29),[443] offer instead a critique, with Hughes inviting 'all those earnest Christians who are interested in what they call "the Second Blessing," and "the Pentecostal Blessing,"' to 'take the plain hint which St Peter has given them; and instead of giving a loose rein to their fancies,… bring their interpretation of the great event of the Day of Pentecost into harmony with the prophet Joel.'[444] This means, first, recognising that 'the special spiritual blessing' is given after the 'physical needs of people are… abundantly satisfied;'[445] second, that it is a gift of prophecy or 'divine illumination,' providing 'a vivid realisation of God' and 'the Kingdom… which Christ

[439] Ibid., p. 175.
[440] Ibid., p. x.
[441] Hughes, *Essential Christianity*, pp. 168-76.
[442] Ibid., p. 176.
[443] Ibid., pp. 148-64.
[444] Ibid., p. 155.
[445] Ibid., p. 150.

came to establish,' '"dreams" of Social Salvation,' and '"visions" of a good time coming for the entire human race;'[446] third, the empowerment it provides is 'the moral courage "to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness;"'[447] and finally, on the basis of Joel 3:17, 'that "Jerusalem shall be holy," to recognise that 'the ultimate goal' of Pentecost is…

> not merely holy individuals, and groups of holy individuals… but a "holy City," a righteous Christian Society, where law, custom, and opinion are brought into beautiful harmony with the thoughts and purposes of God.[448]

In re-casting the Pentecostal blessing in social terms, however, Hughes neither abandons nor downplays the role of the Spirit. Refusing to accept 'the fatal divorce between Personal Christianity and Social Christianity,' he is adamant that 'Personal Conversion must precede Social Conversion,' firmly maintaining that efforts at social transformation 'when separated from the supernatural co-operation of the Holy Spirit, end in disappointment and despair.'[449] No surprise, therefore, that in 1901, in the preface to Isaac Page's book of the same name, Hughes should express the hope that it 'would do much to promote the greatest of all blessings – "Another Pentecost."'[450]

Reflections

'I cannot get over the great loss we have suffered,' wrote John Brash, on the death of Hugh Price Hughes in 1902 at the age of fifty-five: 'I do not think Methodism has, ever since the death of Wesley, lost a man whose removal has left such a blank.'[451] Yet,

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[446] Ibid., pp. 156-7, 60.
[447] Ibid., p. 160.
[448] Ibid., p. 170.
[449] Ibid., p. 174.
[450] Isaac E. Page, *Another Pentecost. With preface by Hugh Price Hughes* (London: S. W. Partridge & Co., 1901), p. 6.
[451] *John Brash*, pp. 53-4.

Hughes had made his mark, awakening a generation of Methodists to a vital yet neglected element of the Wesleyan holiness tradition – its social dimension. He was, as Strawson remarks, 'a radical holiness man, if ever there was one,'[452] whose synthesis of evangelistic, social, and political endeavours re-expressed in late Victorian Britain Wesley's intent 'to spread scriptural holiness over the land.'[453]

Like Wesley, Hughes was a practical theologian too immersed in the everyday work of ministry and mission to provide a systematic account of his thought, particularly in relation to the holiness tradition. Speculative debates about sinlessness held no interest – Hughes neither claimed perfection, nor encouraged others to do so. Indeed, the very theme of holiness is veiled in his sermons by more pressing concerns, despite being pivotal to Hughes's life and work, as his daughter confirms.[454] Hughes's gaze is ever-fixed on Christ, through whose compassionate eyes he urges Christians to look upon a needy world, and respond accordingly.[455] Christ-like action is the mark of true Christianity, and therefore of holiness. In this, Hughes took Wesley's emphasis on works of mercy to a new level, though hinted at in Wesley's support for Wilberforce and the campaign to end slavery:[456] the amelioration of poverty and distress was not enough, social and political change was needed to ensure their removal – this was the kind of 'eradication' that occupied Hughes's mind. To that end Hughes gave expression to a Christian faith that was firmly engaged in the social, economic, and political life of the nation, and to an understanding of Wesleyan holiness extending far

[452] Strawson, 'Methodist Theology 1850-1950,' p. 229.
[453] Wesley, 'Minutes of Several Conversations,' §4, *Works*, 10:875.
[454] Hughes, *The Life of Hugh Price Hughes*, p. 248.
[455] The theme of the first sermon in Hughes, *Social Christianity*, p. 15.
[456] Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 531.

beyond the individual, offering hope of social transformation: a Christ-like world! This remains his legacy.

3.4 Robert Newton Flew

Robert Newton Flew could not have been better suited to his appointment in 1927 as Tutor in New Testament Studies at Wesley House, Cambridge, founded six years earlier to provide an Oxbridge education for Methodist ministerial students.[457] The forty-one-year-old son of the manse had read classics and theology at Oxford, gaining a first, studied German in Bonn and Marburg, volunteered as a naval chaplain, taught at the United Theological College, Bangalore, and served with distinction as minister in three London circuits.[458] For the next twenty-eight years, Flew remained at Wesley House, the last eighteen as Principal, engaged in the spiritual and theological formation of several generations of ministers who would serve the Methodist Church for the rest of the century.[459] During this time Flew exerted a significant influence both within and beyond Methodism: as President of the Methodist Conference (1946-7), Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council (1945-6), Chair of the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission on the Church, and prominent advocate of Methodist-Anglican reunion,[460] enjoying 'a rightfully recognized position in national life well beyond that of Free churchmen of any previous generation.'[461] A 'scholar-evangelist,' Flew is

[457] Gordon S. Wakefield, *Robert Newton Flew, 1886-1962* (London: Epworth Press, 1971), pp. 73-4. 'About Wesley House,' Wesley House, Cambridge, https://www.wesley.cam.ac.uk/about/history/ accessed 25 June 2019.
[458] Wakefield, *Robert Newton Flew*. 'Flew, (Robert) Newton,' Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/39614accessed 24 June 2019.
[459] Wakefield, *Robert Newton Flew*, pp. 78-9.
[460] John Munsey Turner, *Modern Methodism in England 1932-1998*, ed. C S Rodd, Exploring Methodism (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1998), pp. 33, 62, 84.
[461] Hastings, *A History of English Christianity*, p. 499.

particularly remembered for his book, *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology* (1934), based on a thesis for which he was awarded an Oxford Doctorate of Divinity.[462]

The Wesleyan ideal

Flew's return to Wesley's ideal was prompted by the outbreak of the First World War, when he and other young ministers became 'dismayed by the spiritual unpreparedness of the Christian Church.'

> Amid the conflicts of those years of war, some of us stumbled on the principle of John Wesley… that the truest evangelism is to preach the full ideal for which power is offered in the present life. 'The work of God does not prosper', said John Wesley, 'where perfect love is not preached.'[463]

Flew became convinced that 'evangelistic advance can only be sustained if the Christian ideal for this life is steadily set forth in all its beauty and its fullness as being by the grace of God something not impossible of attainment.'[464] The rediscovery of Wesley's doctrine coincided with travels in 1915 and 1916 to France, Switzerland, Italy, and Rome, where Flew acquired a 'love of Roman spirituality,' and an appreciation of 'the Catholic character of Methodism.'[465] These two factors – the missional and Catholic – explain Flew's fascination with the Wesleyan ideal and why, in *The Idea of Perfection*, as Gordon Wakefield remarks, he attempts to 'relate the Methodist understanding of Christian perfection to Catholic Christianity and post-Wesleyan developments' by tracing the 'idea of perfection' from the teaching of Jesus to Albrecht Ritschl, thereby demonstrating its rightful place at the heart of the Christian tradition, whilst being critical of certain elements of Wesley's doctrine.[466]

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[462] Wakefield, *Robert Newton Flew*, p. 70. Flew, *The Idea of Perfection*.
[463] *The Idea of Perfection*, p. xiii.
[464] Ibid.
[465] Wakefield, *Robert Newton Flew*, pp. 28-33.
[466] Ibid., p. 114.

An Alternative Spirituality

Flew's interest in Wesley's ideal was in the context of a broader search for an alternative spirituality better suited to the new world order, now firmly modernist, ushered in by the deep fissure the war had created. Flew believed that more was needed to nourish twentieth-century Christian life than was bequeathed by holiness revivalism, and whilst he remained committed to Wesley's ideal, unlike some of his contemporaries deterred by its revivalist expression, he shared their concerns.[467] Writing to his mother on 4th October 1915, Flew condemned the behaviour of a colleague who, at a meeting, 'had spoken not without sense on entire sanctification:'

> But he ends up by asking all who want to claim the blessing straight away to come out and line up in front…and has a high old time procuring the second blessing for these lined up sinners. God forgive me but I do not like this way and fall into profanity when I think about it. Were Peter and John and the rest lined up in front on the day of Pentecost? Was our founder… lined up in Aldersgate Street?... Must I verily line up if I want to see the Lord? Ah, no, verily but it is hard for those of us who love him in sincerity and passion to see misguided fanatics come along, torture sensitive hearts, spoil meetings aflame with desire, and try to force every experience on to the Procrustean bed of their narrow holiness.
> When will these fellows learn something of the awe, the tenderness, the delicacy, the mysterious issues which belong to the ministry of souls?[468]

Accepting that 'we ministers [are] the real culprits in this sickness and impotence of [the] Church,'[469] Flew sought a way forward among a small group of minsters, led by William Russell Maltby (1866-1951), whose war-time meetings led to the establishment of the School of Fellowship (1916) and the Fellowship of the Kingdom (1919), providing an alternative spirituality to that of the holiness movement, whilst transcending 'the triviality of much Church life' with its concern for 'a living experience of God-in-Christ here and now.'[470]

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[467] Wakefield, *Methodist Spirituality*, p. 61.
[468] Ibid. Wakefield, *Robert Newton Flew*, pp. 36-8.
[469] *Robert Newton Flew*, p. 38.
[470] Turner, *Modern Methodism*, p. 320. Wakefield, *Robert Newton Flew*, pp. 34-5.

The Fellowship of the Kingdom[471]

The formation of the Fellowship of the Kingdom (FK), together with its annual gathering at Swanwick, offered Methodism's growing liberal evangelical ministerial constituency a spirituality embracing the latest Biblical scholarship, focussed not on Pentecost but the historical Jesus and his kingdom.[472] FK adopted the terminology of 'Quest, Crusade, and Fellowship' to express its ideals: Quest evoked the idea of faith as a journey rather than a crisis; Crusades replaced revivals, with the challenge to 'follow Jesus in the service of mankind;' and fellowship groups provided safe space for ministers to study and share, continuing 'the spirit of the class meeting.'[473] This prompted Chadwick's response that, 'He was not on a quest…since the experience of scriptural holiness, which he described as the greatest event of his life, had given him what others were still groping towards.'[474] But FK and Swanwick had not strayed so far as to reject experience, but only to seek it in fresh ways, with Swanwick becoming the vehicle for many ministers to experience Christ anew, in silence and contemplation rather than the exuberance of the revival meeting.[475] Great importance was attached to 'what was consciously termed Holy Communion,' leading to a greater sacramental emphasis and the founding of the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship in 1935.[476] The importance of FK cannot be underestimated. Many young ministers, destined to be future leaders of the Church, came under its influence, including the pre-eminent post-war triumvirate of William Sangster, Donald Soper, and Leslie Weatherhead, the latter stating that FK 'had meant more to him than anything else in his ministry.'[477]

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[471] For a detailed study see Randall, *Evangelical Experiences*, pp. 110-41.
[472] Ibid., p. 110.
[473] Ibid., pp. 118-28.
[474] Ibid., p. 118.
[475] Ibid., p. 114.
[476] Ian M. Randall, 'Southport and Swanwick: Contrasting Movements of Methodist Spirituality in Inter-War England,' *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* Vol. 50, no. 1 (1995): pp. 10-11.
[477] Wakefield, *Methodist Spirituality*, p. 67.

The School of Fellowship with its annual conference at Swanwick extended the ideals and spirituality of FK to lay people, reaching local church level through the *Manuals of Fellowship*, small group study materials, edited jointly by Flew and Maltby from 1917–1930.[478] Employing the best modern scholarship, and concerned with making the faith better understood among the laity, the *Manuals of Fellowship* made an important contribution to the Christian formation of many Methodists in the inter-war period, re-invigorating the small group experience in Methodism at a time when the class meeting had disappeared or grown stale.[479]

The Idea of Perfection

Flew begins *The Idea of Perfection* by posing two perennial questions for which 'Christian theology may reasonably be expected to provide an answer:' 'What is the Christian ideal for the present life? And is it the will of God that by His grace we should attain to it?'[480] In the next twenty-one chapters, each devoted to a New Testament writer, theologian, movement, or historical period, Flew surveys 'the whole development of the idea of Christian maturity in both Catholic and Protestant spirituality,' writing with considerable erudition and spiritual insight in his search for answers.[481]

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[478] *Robert Newton Flew*, pp. 35-8. Flew also contributed a Manual to the series: R. Newton Flew, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, ed. W. R. Maltby and R. Newton Flew, vol. 2, The Manuals of Fellowship, Series 1 (London: Epworth Press, 1917).

[479] The development of house groups can be traced to the activities of FK and its rediscovery of small group fellowship, and to the influence of the 'Cambridge Group Movement' amongst university students in the 1930s that became replicated across 'the Methodist student world.' Rupert E. Davies, 'Since 1932,' in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George, and Gordon Rupp, 3, (London: Epworth Press, 1983), p. 361.

[480] Flew, *The Idea of Perfection*, p. xi.

[481] Turner, *Modern Methodism*, p. 83.

Flew finds those answers not in Wesley, Ritschl, Schleiermacher, Law, Pietism, the Reformation, Aquinas, Augustine, Monasticism, Macarius, the early church, or even the New Testament writings of Hebrews, Paul and John, all of which are included in his survey, but in Jesus's teaching on the kingdom of God, found in the synoptic gospels. Here is the 'supreme ideal' of perfection and 'the standard by which all Christian theories of perfection are to be measured and judged.'[482] By locating perfection in Jesus's teaching of the kingdom, Flew offers a positive statement of the ideal, not confined to debates about sinlessness, even though freedom from sin is clearly part of it, and with a horizon that extends beyond the individual to the transformation of society. He also finds a way of circumventing the difficulties surrounding the notion of attainment: the kingdom is both present and not yet, thus the perfection that Jesus taught is 'an ideal attainable in this world,' whose 'ultimate goal' belongs to 'the age to come.'[483]

Critiquing Wesley

In the chapter on Methodism, Flew commends Wesley for his teaching on Christian perfection that, unlike others considered, has seen thousands of Methodists attain to the 'expected' ideal amid 'the struggle and suffering of ordinary human life;' is 'connected more directly with the believer's experience of Christ Crucified,' with the possible exception of Quakerism; and is not 'merely individualistic,' but expressed in Christian fellowship and witness.[484] Having praised Wesley, however, Flew proceeds to critique his doctrine, identifying three serious 'defects.'[485]

[482] Flew, *The Idea of Perfection*, p. 12.
[483] Ibid., p. 8.
[484] Ibid., pp. 330-2.
[485] For what follows, see ibid., pp. 332-41.

First, Wesley's definition of sin – a voluntary transgression of a known law – is deemed inadequate, because it fails to take account of the unconscious nature of sin and the hypocrisy of which we are therefore unaware. Similarly, in allowing for the 'instantaneous deliverance from every evil temper,' Wesley implies that sin is a 'thing' that can be 'rooted out' when it is intrinsic to who we are as persons. Instead the whole person must be changed by 'the Indwelling Spirit of God.' On this point, however, Flew fails to appreciate Wesley's affectional moral psychology which is closer to Flew's own understanding than he allows.

Second, Flew takes issue with Wesley for linking assurance with claims to entire sanctification, because though we can be assured of God's love for us, we cannot know ourselves well enough to be assured of our sanctification, thus invalidating testimony to the gift. (This is similar to Pope's view that there is 'no consciousness more unconscious of self, than that of perfect holiness and love.').[486] Flew further suggests that 'Wesley's own reluctance' to claim the gift 'proves that he was not quite happy about this element in his teaching.'

Finally, Flew regards the 'inward ascetism' evident in Methodist attitudes to art, culture, work, and everyday matters as creating a sacred/secular divide that is contrary to the Jesus of the Gospels who reveals God's 'inexhaustible interest in human life.'

[486] Pope, *Compendium of Christian Theology*, p. 56.

Notwithstanding his critique, Flew agrees with Wesley, and the others surveyed, that 'the seeking of an ideal that is realizable in this world is essential to Christianity.'

> It is essential to the corporate life of the Church that this principle should be enshrined at the heart of its doctrines, its hymns, its confessions of faith, its institutions. It is essential for the individual Christian that the goal set before him should not be merely conversion, nor a life of service, but perfection… Christianity is not Christianity unless it is aiming at Perfection.[487]

Reflections

The Idea of Perfection was an attempt to reclaim Wesleyan holiness from its revivalist interpretation at a time when many had abandoned it and to place it firmly within the catholicity of the Christian tradition from which it had emerged. Wesley and Methodist spirituality stood in full accord with the universal Church in viewing perfection as the goal of Christian life. Moreover, its quintessential expression in the teaching of Jesus, located the doctrine within a defining theme of liberal evangelicalism – the kingdom of God. That may have worked both for and against it: the emphasis on the kingdom may have overshadowed the call to perfection, although intended as a vehicle for its interpretation; Bultmann's 'Christ of faith' would soon undermine trust in the viability of accessing the 'Jesus of history,' on which Flew's arguments were based;[488] the Second World War and the Holocaust made Flew's views appear naively idealistic in the face of the enormity of such moral evil; and the collapse of the liberal evangelical consensus[489] in the 1960s and early 1970s would confine Flew's thought to a bygone era.

[487] Flew, *The Idea of Perfection*, p. 398.
[488] Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* [Der historiche Jesus. Ein Lehrbuch], trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1998), pp. 6-7.
[489] Wellings, *Evangelicals in Methodism*, p. 38.

Perhaps most significant of all is the fact that *The Idea of Perfection* was a work of scholarship, directed to the academy rather than to the ordinary Christian. And whilst Flew may have exerted some indirect influence upon church members through the students who passed through Wesley House, such influence will have worked both ways, with ministers not only being encouraged but also unsettled by his critique of Wesley's doctrine resulting in a distancing from the very tradition that Flew endeavoured to espouse. Nonetheless, Flew remains an important interpreter of Wesley's ideal, reminding Methodists who take the trouble to read him that, as Langford states, 'To love God perfectly stands before all Christians as the purpose of life and the meaning of salvation – a challenge to maturity and a gift of grace.'[490]

3.5 William Edwin Sangster

In the dark days of World War II, W. E. Sangster, Superintendent minster at Westminster Central Hall, divided his evenings between assisting the 'bombed-out people' in the basement come air-raid shelter beneath the Hall, and writing his doctoral thesis on Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection, published in 1943 as *The Path to Perfection*.[491] Sangster was one of Methodism's most celebrated preachers; he was also a passionate advocate of Wesleyan holiness, and concerned about its neglect, which he attributed in part to aspects of the tradition considered unsustainable 'in the light of modern biblical, theological and psychological knowledge,' particularly the understanding of sin.[492] A brilliant communicator in both speech and print, Sangster

[490] Thomas A. Langford, *Methodist Theology*, Exploring Methodism (Peterborough, UK: Epworth Press, 1998), p. 70.
[491] Sangster, *The Path to Perfection*, p. 6.
[492] Andrew J. Cheatle, *William Sangster: Heir of John Wesley?* (Sheffield: The Wesley Fellowship, 2013), p. 7. For an excellent and thorough account of Sangster's views based upon an examination of his many books, pamphlets, and articles, see, *W.E. Sangster - Herald of holiness : a critical analysis of the*

endeavoured to restate it, both in scholarly and popular terms, intent that Wesley's doctrine be given rightful prominence in the hearts, minds, and everyday witness of the Methodist people.

Born in 1900, Sangster grew up in a nominally Anglican working-class London family, before being introduced to Methodism when nine-years old by a friend who invited him to the 'ultra-evangelical' Radnor Street Mission, close to (and under the auspices of) Wesley's Chapel.[493] Converted in 1913, having 'adopted a puritan otherworldliness that would follow him for the rest of his life,' Sangster preached his first sermon in 1917, and, after serving in the army, was nominated and accepted for the Wesleyan ministry in 1919.[494] At Richmond College, a fellow student recalled how 'John Wesley's doctrine of "perfect love" strongly appealed to him,' and remembered his 'quest for personal holiness,'[495] but it was not until August 1936, as he moved from Scarborough to Leeds, Brunswick, following Leslie Weatherhead, that Sangster began to study the doctrine that would define his ministry.[496]

Methodism Can be Born Again[497]

Published in the year that Methodists celebrated the two-hundredth anniversary of the conversion of the Wesleys, the dedication on the cover of *Methodism Can be Born Again* (1938), the book in which Sangster first sets out his thoughts on holiness, is striking: 'To "The People Called Methodists" with much affection and warm gratitude

doctrines of sanctification and perfection in the thought of W.E. Sangster, Studies in Evangelical History and Thought (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010).

[493] *Herald of Holiness*, pp. 2-5. Paul Sangster, *Doctor Sangster* (London: Epworth Press, 1962), pp. 28-33.

[494] *Doctor Sangster*, pp. 32-4, 46-7. Cheatle, *Herald of Holiness*, p. 3.

[495] Sangster, *Doctor Sangster*, p. 51.

[496] Cheatle, *Herald of Holiness*, p. 77.

[497] W. E. Sangster, *Methodism Can be Born Again* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938).

but in deep concern.' Sangster is concerned at what he regards, even in the immediate aftermath of its historic reunion, as Methodism's dismal decline, contrasting sharply with the 'startling… triumphs' of its birth, prompting the 'gnawing' question, 'Can Methodism be born again?'[498] Not content with the reasons given – 'Changed ideas of the Bible,' 'counter attractions,' 'The wireless,' 'Migration to new building areas,' 'the spirit of secularism'[499] – Sangster attributes Methodism's decline to the loss of 'missionary passion' and the neglect of the very doctrine for which it was raised up: Christian perfection.[500] Seeing little to distinguish between those inside and outside the Church, Sangster argues that the Church's 'urgent need' is for '*more saints*' – people whose Christ-like lives 'make it easy for others to believe,'[501] establishing the link between holiness and evangelism that characterised his preaching and teaching.

Yet there is a deeper problem troubling Sangster: the 'widespread' prejudice that accounts for the fact that '*this doctrine is not preached to-day*.'[502] 'The mere mention of it in conversation is apt to startle someone into warnings about its dangers.'[503] The acknowledged difficulties, however, are not insurmountable as Flew had shown.[504] What is needed is that 'The gulf between the scholar and the ordinary church member should be bridged.'[505] Sangster had discovered his vocation: God was calling him to be

[498] Ibid., p. 17.
[499] Ibid., pp. 21-3.
[500] Ibid., pp. 66-7, 88.
[501] Ibid., pp. 86-8.
[502] Ibid., p. 90.
[503] Ibid., p. 89.
[504] Ibid., p. 90. Sangster recognised the difficulties associated with Wesley's definition of sin, and rejected instantaneous 'eradication,' and stated that claims to being 'fully sanctified' made him 'shudder.' ibid., pp. 91-4.
[505] Ibid., p. 90.

a 'leader' within the Church, 'To call Methodism back to its real work.'[506] To that end, Sangster embarked upon a more detailed examination of Wesley's doctrine.

The Path to Perfection

Between 1939 and 1942, Sangster subjected Wesley's doctrine to the scrutiny of modern biblical, theological, and psychological thought, in the manner of 'theological liberalism,' in order to restate it in terms that would carry conviction in a world much-changed since Wesley's day.[507] As Cheatle explains, the greatest conceptual difference lay in Sangster's 'Acceptance of Theistic Evolution,' albeit retaining 'a form of the doctrine of original sin,' leading him to re-interpret Wesley's 'Fall–restoration paradigm' in terms of 'perfecting,' so that 'original righteousness is the destiny to which God is shaping humankind, not a condition to which humankind is restored.'[508] In this, Sangster combined 'a modern view of humanity's derivation with a biblical view of human sinfulness.'[509]

Sangster begins *The Path to Perfection* by examining the texts on which Wesley's doctrine is based, drawing on the latest biblical scholarship to conclude 'that the New Testament plainly teaches that the Christian need not sin.'[510] In a discussion of theological concerns, Sangster adopts Wesley's 'favourite term' – 'Perfect Love' – as the best descriptor of his doctrine, thereby avoiding many of the difficulties Wesley had encountered in using other terminology.[511] In summary, 'It is indwelling love, banishing all conscious sin, received by faith in an instant, and maintained from

[506] Sangster, *Doctor Sangster*, pp. 108-10.
[507] Cheatle, *Herald of Holiness*, p. 103.
[508] Ibid., pp. 92-104, 44, 66.
[509] Ibid., p. 103.
[510] Sangster, *The Path to Perfection*, p. 52.
[511] Ibid., pp. 77-8.

moment to moment by humble dependence on God.'[512] From this vantage point, Sangster sets out a positive, dynamic, and relational interpretation of holiness, which he correctly considered to be the essence of Wesley's thought.

In applying the insights of modern psychology to Wesley's doctrine, without which no 'satisfying examination' can be conducted,[513] Sangster regards debates about the eradication of sin as addressing the wrong question: sin is not a '*thing*, [and] cannot be "rooted out."'[514] 'Sin is in the erring will' and bound up in 'the whole personality.'[515] Agreeing with Flew, and contrary to Wesley and revivalist interpretations, Sangster rejects claims to being 'cleansed from all sin' as inviting 'misunderstanding,' reiterating the view that 'No man knows what is in him.'[516] Importantly, however, he accepts the validity behind such claims, suggesting they 'mean no more than this: "At this moment I am conscious of nothing but love."'[517] Yet, in line with Wesley's doctrine, Sangster asserts that 'a great claim' may be made:

> God does it! He does not "eradicate" sin…[But]… He gives victory in the fight with temptation by drawing the heart towards Himself and all Wholeness, and fills that heart with positive and objective love.[518]

This is the work of the Holy Spirit, operating at all levels of our minds – the conscious, subconscious, and unconscious – though 'never doing violence to our personality but constraining and wooing us to a higher life.'[519] In this way Sangster sets the Spirit's work within the context of Jungian psychology[520] to restate the transformative,

[512] Ibid., p. 91.
[513] Ibid., p. 104.
[514] Ibid., p. 115.
[515] Ibid.
[516] Ibid., p. 135.
[517] Ibid.
[518] Ibid., p. 136.
[519] Ibid., p. 123.
[520] Cheatle, *Herald of Holiness*, pp. 116, 18.

affectional, and attainable aspects of Wesleyan holiness interpreted in relational terms as perfect love.

But Sangster does not ignore its social implications, extending the concept of sin beyond its individualistic interpretation to include its 'social guises:'

> the selfishness which clings to dubious theories of economics…, the jealousy which guards individual privileges…, the wilful ignorance of other people's lives…, the subordination of industry to finance…, the vast inequalities of opportunity which still exist in regard to health, education and leisure.'[521]

Shaping the 'social order' in accordance with God's purposes is the inescapable vocation of all who seek the 'perfect life in an imperfect world.'[522] Yet this presents significant challenges to both the Christian and the doctrine, as Sangster argues in a discussion of differing responses to war made by Christians struggling to maintain the ideal amid dreadful reality.[523] In exposing the dilemmas and compromises intrinsic to the complexities of life in the modern world, Sangster, as Cheatle discerns, works with a 'perfection of motive,' rather than of 'performance.'[524] Yet for all the demands that the societal implications of the doctrine impose, Sangster is adamant that the patient pursuit of perfection is not something to which Christians who have God's 'supernatural love' filling 'their consecrated hearts' are 'unequal.'[525] God's grace, Sangster asserts, knows no limit: what is needed on our part is 'faithful attending on God' in order to receive the gift.[526] Concluding his restatement, Sangster points to the writings and testimony of John Fletcher, John Brash, and Benjamin Helier – three

[521] Sangster, *The Path to Perfection*, p. 183.
[522] Ibid., pp. 168-84.
[523] Ibid., pp. 177-81.
[524] Cheatle, *Herald of Holiness*, p. 148.
[525] Sangster, *The Path to Perfection*, p. 183.
[526] Ibid., p. 197.

'credible witnesses' of Wesley's doctrine – the contemplation of whom incite us to holiness.[527] In this he strikes another of his vital themes: the importance of the 'saints' as exemplars of perfect love.

Post-war exponent of holiness

There was no greater exponent of Wesleyan holiness in post-war Britain than Sangster. In *Methodism: Her unfinished task* (1947), the question he posed was simply stated:

> Called into being by God, what work did God design that it should do? John Wesley always insisted that the purpose of Methodism was 'to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land'. The phrase sounds a little archaic today but no man can miss the meaning. The people were to be made Christ-like. Has it been done?[528]

The Methodist Church to which that challenge was directed became energised in the post-war years into renewing itself, and Sangster was determined that Wesleyan holiness should be at the heart of it. He was one of several distinguished leaders and scholars, including Flew, appointed by the 1943 Conference, whose impressive report, *The Message and Mission of Methodism* (1946), bore Sangster's hallmark: challenging Methodists to embrace their historic emphases anew, including Scriptural holiness, and calling for a 'revival of sanctity' and the development of Christian character, the area in which 'the most lamentable failure of the Church lies.'[529] Sangster did not underestimate the scale of the challenge:

> One of the tragedies of this branch of the Church is to be found in her neglect of the very doctrine God raised her up to recover. It is not understood, seldom preached, half hidden by some (who apologize when they mention it) and left, alas! to people who have been labelled (justly or unjustly) as 'cranks'. Many ministers in Methodism do not even esteem the doctrine as a treasure, and would part with it with a yawn.[530]

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[527] Ibid., pp. 198-201.
[528] W. E. Sangster, *Methodism. Her unfinished task* (London: Epworth Press, 1947), pp. 11-12.
[529] The Methodist Church, *The Message and Mission of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1946), pp. vii, 17, 22-5, 50-51.
[530] Sangster, *Methodism. Her unfinished task*, p. 33.

Elected President of Conference for the year 1950-1951, Sangster used his Presidential address to remind Conference that Methodism had been 'raised up to spread "Scriptural Holiness" throughout the land,' a theme reiterated in his address to the Ministerial Session, where he expressed concern for those who saw little that was attractive in the lives of Church members, imploring his colleagues: 'I plead with you to preach holiness.'[531] That address, as Andrew Cheatle remarks, 'reads like a lament on the neglect of this doctrine in British Methodism,' with Sangster reminding his colleagues that Wesley 'explicitly held a goal before the people,' whereas, "Because we are afraid to say, 'The perfect is possible,' we are in danger of implying that to be 'highly respectable' is enough. It isn't."[532]

To encourage Methodists, Sangster wrote *Holiness*,[533] a practical and pastoral pamphlet in which he describes holiness as a matter of being 'truly in love with goodness; to have a heart always bent to the best things and to feel the needle of one's conscience always pointing to the moral north.'[534] Holiness is meant for 'ordinary people,' the gradual outcome of a life of prayer and adoration rather than an instantaneous change, though the desire for it may be such.[535]

> It is a moment-by-moment life in God: an in-breathing of the Spirit; an out-breathing of the breath devitalized by use or tainted by a sub-consciousness not yet completely interpenetrated by the Spirit of God.[536]

[531] Sangster, *Doctor Sangster*, p. 208. For the full text, see W. E. Sangster, 'The President on Holiness,' *The Methodist Recorder*, August 3, 1950, pp. 1, 3.
[532] Cheatle, *Herald of Holiness*, p. 153. Sangster, 'The President on Holiness,' p. 1.
[533] *Holiness*, Pharos Papers, no. 5 (London: Epworth Press, 1950).
[534] Ibid., p. 2.
[535] Ibid., pp. 3-7.
[536] Ibid., p. 6.

The Pure in Heart[537]

Sangster pursued this further in the final phase of his developing thought in *The Pure in Heart* (1954), a study in sanctity, described by Wakefield as 'astonishingly Catholic in its exempla.'[538] On the basis that holiness is best encountered in the life of Christ and the saints, Sangster studied the lives of saints drawn from the full spectrum of Christian tradition to discover those qualities which constitute a Christ-like life. The 'secret of the saints,' he concludes, is this: 'They ATTEND and OBEY.'[539] Worship and obedience become the 'two principles [that] underlie all Christian sanctity.'[540] Yet, the ultimate secret lies not in the saints themselves but in the purposes and gracious activity of God, as the Holy Spirit, 'working for holiness' in the human soul, invites the responsive and 'robust faith of the believer.'[541] 'Only God can make a saint.'[542]

It is here that Sangster makes an important contribution, displaying a firm grasp of the affectional dynamic of holiness, so vital to a proper appreciation of Wesley's understanding. 'The self is not a closed system,' he asserts, but 'capable of response to the highest.'

> The saints have seen the burning heart of God. Their own love has leaped out in flaming response, and they have loved the Lord their God with all their heart and soul and strength and mind – and their neighbours as themselves. Part of the service of the saints to the world is to show how the circle of our egotism may be broken and how man may live the life of love.'[543]

Citing Teresa of Avila's 'blinding realization of God's love' in the familiar picture of the scourging of Christ causing her to begin life anew 'with a sense of unpayable debt,'

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[537] W. E. Sangster, *The Pure In Heart: A Study in Christian Sanctity* (London: Epworth Press, 1954).
[538] Wakefield, *Methodist Spirituality*, p. 76.
[539] Sangster, *The Pure in Heart*, p. 197.
[540] Ibid.
[541] Ibid., p. 40.
[542] Ibid., p. 42.
[543] Ibid., pp. 238-9.

Sangster elucidates an affectional dynamic of holiness centred on the cross.[544] 'The love which God begets *in* us, by the vision of His love *for* us, widens, in the saints, to embrace mankind.'[545] This is the way to holiness that Sangster would have all Christians travel:

> Holiness is not a monopoly of the cloisters, or of one branch of Christendom. The energies of the Holy Spirit are available to everyone who will seek Him.[546]

Or, as Sangster succinctly put it in the title of a later pamphlet: 'You Can Be a Saint.'[547]

Reflections

William Sangster 'preached holiness, wrote it, thought about it until he was convinced it was the only proper study for man, and what mattered most, he tried to live it,' as his son correctly recorded.[548] As we have discovered, by all the means at his disposal, Sangster espoused and argued, as he had done since the 1930s, that holiness was Methodism's greatest need and the key to a re-invigorated Church, credible witness, and effective evangelism, and in this respect, his endeavours support the contention of this thesis. His restatement of Wesley's doctrine in terms of the 'perfecting' of human nature,' with 'perfect love,' rather than the 'eradication of sin,' as its positive goal, and its construal of the Christian perfection realisable in this life as being that of 'motive' rather than absolute 'performance,' combined with his enunciation of its social implications, continues to offer a way forward for contemporary interpretation.

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[544] Ibid., p. 240.
[545] Ibid., p. 245.
[546] Ibid., p. 250.
[547] Cited in Cheatle, *Herald of Holiness*, p. 164.
[548] Sangster, *Doctor Sangster*, p. 288.

Surprisingly missing, however, from Sangster's re-statement is an emphasis on the means of grace, there being 'little, if no mention of the importance of the class meeting, fellowship, Holy Communion, liturgy or even corporate worship.'[549] In this respect Sangster clearly falls short of Wesley's holistic understanding. Notwithstanding this important omission, Sangster's impassioned yet scholarly exposition and popular advocacy of the Wesleyan ideal, setting perfect love as a viable goal, pursued, and attained through loving attention and faithful obedience, remains unmatched within Methodism to this day. In this respect, Sangster's death from muscular atrophy shortly before his 60th birthday, on 24th May 1960 – Wesley Day! – marked the end of an era. The tradition had lost its most passionate advocate. Moreover, Sangster was one of the few ministers who carried sufficient respect across Methodism for the doctrine to gain a sympathetic hearing, yet alone renewed commitment. He was under no illusions that the doctrine was effectively absent within the Methodism he knew so well. It was this very absence that prompted Sangster's determined and unashamed advocacy of the doctrine he re-stated and so faithfully lived – an exemplar to us all.

3.6 John J. Vincent

In September 1961, the *Methodist Recorder* published a series of three articles on 'The Methodism Gone for Ever: the Methodism Striving to be Born' by Methodist minister, John Vincent.[550] They caused a 'furore,' sparking numerous letters and four leading

[549] Cheatle, *Herald of Holiness*, p 154.
[550] John J. Vincent, 'The Methodism Gone for Ever: the Methodism Striving to be Born,' *The Methodist Recorder*, September 7, 1961, p. 11. 'Christianity as 'Doing Things': The 'New' Methodism ' *The Methodist Recorder*, September 14, 1965, p. 9. 'The Methodism Striving to be Born: Great Need for New Forward Movement,' *The Methodist Recorder*, September 21, 1961, p. 11.

articles refuting Vincent's views.[551] In the provocative and prophetic style that became his hallmark, Vincent declared that the Methodism founded upon Wesley's' 'experiential' doctrines of Justification, Assurance, and Holiness had 'gone for ever.'[552] Neither the contemporary 'experiences' of Methodists nor their 'intellectual and theological world' matched that of their forebears.[553] Their new world demanded a Christian theology and practice, grounded not in 'experience' but in 'costly discipleship.'[554] New patterns of evangelism, ministry, worship, church architecture, and church structures were essential for what Vincent envisioned as 'a new Forward Movement,' echoing Hughes, yet concluding:

> Whether we get it or not may well depend upon whether we are prepared to venture into untried ways, listen to new voices, open ourselves to new influences from the world and from the Church Catholic today.[555]

'The Times They Are A-Changin''[556]

Vincent was not alone: everywhere, it seemed, change was in the air. In 1961, the New English Bible was published and became a 'best-seller,' its contemporary style and language seemingly more suited to the new era.[557] In the Catholic world, Pope John XXIII announced the Second Vatican Council, which opened in 1962, and "talked of *aggiornamento* (a bringing up to date), of taking note of the 'signs of the times.'"[558] Scarcely had the Council begun its deliberations than in 1963 the Beatles burst upon

[551] John J. Vincent, *Christ and Methodism: Towards a New Christianity for a New Age* (London: Epworth Press, 1965), p. 2. 'The Methodist Recorder,' (London: The Methodists Newspaper Co. Ltd., 1950—), September 21, 28; October 5, 12, 19, 1961.
[552] Vincent, 'The Methodism Gone for Ever.'
[553] Ibid.
[554] Vincent, 'Christianity as 'Doing Things'.' 'The Methodism Striving to be Born.'
[555] 'The Methodism Striving to be Born.'
[556] The title of the 1964 song and album by Bob Dylan, 'The Times They Are A-Changin',' http://www.bobdylan.com/albums/the-times-they-are-a-changin/ accessed 29 July 2019.
[557] Hastings, *A History of English Christianity*, p. 534.
[558] Ibid., p. 520.

the scene, greeted by scenes of widespread teenage hysteria. It soon became clear that a major cultural shift was underway, with rapid changes in popular music, fashion, and sexual morality. John Robinson's *Honest to God,* written to make Christianity intelligible to the ordinary person, challenged traditional conceptions of God amid widespread controversy, contributing to the appearance of 'obituaries of God…in theological periodicals.'[559] 'In this maelstrom,' as Callum Brown asserts, 'traditional religious conceptions of piety were to be suddenly shattered, ending centuries of consensus Christian culture in Britain.'[560] This was the unsettling context in which Methodists were forced to grapple with the relevance of their historic tradition in what was now a very different world. The torch had been passed to a new generation, of whom Vincent was one of the most theologically articulate, yet he saw no continuing role for the holiness tradition.

Renewal Activist

Born in 1929, John Vincent studied in the USA and Switzerland, and served as minister in the Ledbury circuit and the Manchester Mission, where he completed his doctoral studies under Oscar Cullman and Karl Barth at Basel in 1960.[561] A member of the International Society for New Testament Studies, Vincent's thesis was on 'Discipleship in the Gospels,'[562] issuing from his conviction 'that discipleship rather than belief was the essence of Christianity.'[563] In 1962, he became a founding member of the Methodist Renewal Group[564] (not to be confused with Charismatic Renewal) consisting

[559] Ibid., p. 537. Rupert E. Davies, 'Methodism,' in *The Testing of the Churches 1932 - 1982: A Symposium*, ed. Rupert E. Davies, (London: Epworth Press, 1982), p. 42.
[560] Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain*, p. 224.
[561] 'The Methodist Recorder,' September 7, 1961, p. 11.
[562] Ibid.
[563] John J. Vincent, cited in Ian K. Duffield, ed. *Urban Christ: Responses to John Vincent.* (Sheffield: Urban Theology Unit, 1997), p. 14.
[564] Vincent, *Christ and Methodism*, p. 117.

of younger ministers and church members 'profoundly dissatisfied with many forms of the Church's thought, life and activity, but wholly committed to the task of bringing the Gospel home, in word and deed, to the people of this age – an age which they were, perhaps, the first in Methodism to recognize as secular in all its ways.'[565] Undeterred by the criticisms of his *Methodist Recorder* articles, Vincent restated and expanded on his radical views in a tour de force: *Christ and Methodism* (1965).[566]

Christ and Methodism

Always a strident and challenging voice, in *Christ and Methodism*, Vincent dismissed Methodism's distinctive doctrines, including Christian perfection, as no longer relevant, arguing instead for a new focus on Christ as Lord and the call to radical discipleship as he sought 'to give expression to a meaningful Christianity for the modern Methodist.'[567]

> I believe that this is a decisive moment for Methodism, a moment which will be missed unless we are prepared to start living by faith, to stop living by the old slogans which wear increasingly thin, and start listening to some of the new deeds of the Spirit, and the new ideas abroad in the world and in thinking today.[568]

This reference to 'new deeds of the Spirit' is pivotal to Vincent's argument. Far from rejecting Wesley, he claims to follow him by seeking 'radical answers' to the same two questions to which Wesley responded in his day: '"What is the Holy Spirit doing?" and "What does the New Testament say?"'[569]

[565] Davies, 'Since 1932,' pp. 383-4.
[566] Vincent, *Christ and Methodism*.
[567] Ibid., pp. 2-3.
[568] Ibid., p. 3.
[569] Ibid., p. 8.

It is clear to Vincent that the Spirit is doing a new thing – leading God's people into the secular world in the service of the *Secular Christ*,[570] and no longer blessing the Methodist people with the experiences of the past – 'Are our Class Meetings, even when they meet, the weekly occasions of testimony to someone's attaining Perfect Love as a gift from God, experienced in the soul?' – therefore, 'since the experience has gone, the doctrines ought to go as well.'[571]

> We neither expect nor want 'Second Blessings' or 'Entire Sanctification', and we are not noticeably holy. I suggest therefore that we forget about our 'distinctive emphasis upon Holiness', lest some of our friends in other Communions, who are doing their best to understand us and even like us, call our bluff and discover that we are simply being dishonest.[572]

With this statement Vincent draws a line between the present and the past. 'However much some of us talk about "reclaiming our inheritance",' he argues, 'the real position is that that inheritance no longer describes where our people are or where they want to be.'[573] Wesley's quest was an experiential one, giving rise to experiential doctrines, but "For a variety of reasons – philosophical, psychological, theological – the 'experiential' line *to certainty* is now closed to us. Only One Authority remains: Jesus Christ."[574]

Discipleship

Deeply challenged by Bonhoeffer's question, 'Who is Christ for man today?', Vincent finds his answer in the synoptic Gospels, especially St. Mark: 'He is God's radical demand to us and not just His open gift to us.'[575] Faith, according to the Gospels, 'is

[570] John J. Vincent, *Secular Christ: A Contemporary Interpretation of Jesus* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968).
[571] *Christ and Methodism*, p. 46.
[572] Ibid., p. 45.
[573] Ibid., p 47.
[574] Ibid., p. 20.
[575] Ibid., p. 18. Vincent, *Secular Christ*, p. 27.

not intellectual assent,' nor '"an inner conviction of the heart", as Wesley taught, but the practical and existential committing oneself to Christ in a concrete and real deed.'[576] Vincent, therefore, asks, 'does not Discipleship more accurately describe our Christian life than the old evangelical salvation-scheme terms like justification, assurance and perfection?'[577] Discipleship, therefore, becomes Vincent's 'New Christianity for a New Age,' both challenging and reassuring many, like Elizabeth Mitchell,

> who thought I needed to have some conceptual grasp of who Jesus was and what he was about and how I might be in relationship with him, before being able to commit myself to action.[578]

In this, Vincent is strangely reminiscent of Phoebe Palmer, who bypassed experience with her shorter way, emphasising 'naked faith.'[579] But unlike Palmer, Vincent abandons the Wesleyan tradition and its pursuit of holiness to follow Christ into the secular world, obeying the call to radical discipleship. He calls for incarnational mission, appealing to middle-class Methodists to discover what it means to be 'a church for Coronation Street,' injected with 'a sense of discipline, discipleship, adventure and hope,' by maintaining a presence and commitment to the working-class urban communities so many have left.[580] Like Bonhoeffer, Vincent envisions the Christian life as immersion in the world: 'The Christian is the 'Christ man' in the midst of a world in need.'[581] Though he will not admit it, this constitutes Vincent's version of the holy life.

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[576] *Christ and Methodism*, p. 33.
[577] Ibid., pp. 65-6.
[578] Elizabeth Mitchell, 'Discipleship as Centre,' in *Urban Christ: Responses to John Vincent*, ed. Ian K. Duffield, (Sheffield: Urban Theology Unit, 1997), p. 11.
[579] See p. 93.
[580] Vincent, *Christ and Methodism*, pp. 98-100.
[581] Ibid., p. 103.

'The genius of Methodism,' Vincent concludes, 'was that, two hundred years ago, she listened to what the Spirit was doing in the lives of people and made a theology out of it.'[582] Such listening to the Spirit is urgently required again but Vincent is concerned that the voice of the Spirit will struggle to gain a hearing:

> The Methodism striving to be born could be stillborn… through a wholly natural unwillingness to listen to a new generation – a generation which loyally does its best to 'preach our doctrines', does its whack of 'evangelistic missions', and 'keeps our disciplines', but which knows in its heart that all these things stand under question from modern man, from the modern world, from the modern Church, and from the contemporary Christ.[583]

Reflections

John Vincent, with his theological and Biblical expertise, gifts of communication, and passionate advocacy put his vision into practice, helping 'form the Sheffield Inner City Ecumenical Mission,' and founding the Urban Theology Unit in 1969, pioneering 'an alternative theological education and ministerial training' (lay and ordained) rooted in the urban context that continues to this day.[584]

In his passionate critique of Methodism and its distinctive doctrines, Vincent jettisoned Wesley's 'experiential' emphases, including his doctrine of Christian perfection, providing instead 'an authentic Christian radicalism for the second half of the twentieth century.'[585] It is noteworthy that at this same time the Charismatic movement, with its focus on 'experience' and the supernatural gifts of the Spirit, made

[582] Ibid., p. 120.
[583] Ibid., pp. 120-21.
[584] Duffield, *Urban Christ*, pp. 15, 6.
[585] Vincent, *Christ and Methodism*, p. 7.

its first impact in Britain,[586] gaining an early foothold in the Methodist Revival Fellowship.[587]

In his impressive, yet austere, version of a 'New Methodism,' Vincent failed to take account of the development of holy character that can sustain a moment by moment loving response to God and neighbour, which is the crux of Wesley's thought. Yet, it is on this flawed basis that Vincent dismisses Wesley's *grand depositum*, unable to grasp its essential formational dynamic, and failing to appreciate that at its heart, Wesleyan holiness is rooted in that graced, relational, devotion and desire for unbroken communion with God that issues in a Christ-like love and service of God and neighbour – especially of those who need us most – whose outcome is both personal and societal transformation. Nonetheless, Vincent was and remains an important voice, ever-reminding Methodists of all theological persuasions that committed engagement with the world, especially the poor and marginalized, will always be central to any true expression of Wesley's Methodism.

3.7 Conclusions

The six case studies that we have considered, focussing on key individuals as representative examples who played pivotal roles in modifying or transforming the early Wesleyan holiness tradition during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, have revealed how the tradition evolved and changed significantly as it encountered new contexts and found new interpreters. During the late nineteenth century, the tradition appeared to be vibrant and compelling, as a result of the recasting of the tradition by

[586] Hastings, *A History of English Christianity*, pp. 556-8. spanning the two centuries that distance contemporary Methodists from their eighteenth-century forebears,
[587] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 230.

Phoebe Palmer and the American holiness revivalists. Influenced by Fletcher, Palmer and the revivalists re-focussed the tradition on the instantaneous experience of entire sanctification and away from gradual growth, undermining Wesley's finely balanced approach. Their impact on the British scene was profound, particularly after Brighton, leading to the renewed vigour with which Wesleyan Methodists, like Samuel Chadwick, helped secure Pentecostal 'Second Blessing' holiness as the dominant interpretation of the tradition at Cliff College and Southport in the first half of the twentieth century. Viewed as empowerment for mission, holiness was no longer the goal of the Christian life, but its authentic beginning. This undermined Wesley's formational and affectional dynamic, in which the instantaneous reception of the gift was set within the wider context of gradual growth. Furthermore, in accounting for the 'eradication' of sin, these interpreters opted for mechanistic explanations that proved problematic, when according to Wesley's affectional moral psychology, it was a matter of the gradual reshaping of our disordered affections.[588] Their Enlightenment context also rendered obsolete the world of medieval piety, rooted in the Aristotelian/Thomistic tradition of the virtues, so important to Wesley's personal formation and theological vision, and foundational to his understanding of holiness.

In Hugh Price Hughes we noted a distancing from 'second blessing' holiness and the emergence of a different trajectory – Social Christianity – focussed on the 'Christ-like' transformation of society rather than the personal blessing of the individual. This restored a missing yet vital dimension of the tradition – social engagement. The First World War led many Methodists like Robert Newton Flew to further distance

[588] Maddox, 'Holiness of Heart and Life,' p. 152.

themselves from 'Second Blessing' holiness, and to look for an alternative spirituality, finding it in the Fellowship of the Kingdom's emphasis on communion with the living Christ encountered in the Gospels, rather than on the Pentecostal experience. Flew maintained his commitment to the ideal of perfection, however, establishing its rightful place in Christian tradition – Catholic and Protestant – whilst being among the first to offer a positive critique of Wesley. By the late 1930s, when William Sangster's interest in Wesley's doctrine was stirred, the Cliff interpretation had been marginalized and holiness seriously neglected in wider Methodism. Sangster addressed the 'loss' of Methodism's historic emphasis with passionate intensity, restating Wesley's doctrine in line with the latest biblical and psychological scholarship, in ways that were accessible to ordinary Methodists. His endeavours, however, only served to highlight the relative absence of the tradition in the Methodism he knew so well. John Vincent confirmed this during the turbulent 1960s, calling for the abandonment of the tradition on the basis that Methodists no longer had the experiences on which the doctrine was based, proposing instead radical discipleship as the Methodist way forward.

The writing was on the wall. Methodists were beginning to look in new directions, rather than to Wesley, who seemed out of step with the modern world with which they were grappling. By the 1980s, Wesleyan holiness had disappeared under the Methodist radar and seemed to have run its course. That was certainly the view of Vincent, but it was also shared by Cliff College Principal, William Davies, but for entirely different reasons. In *OK, Let's be Methodists* (1984), Vincent repeated his 1960s' claim that the experiences of the early Methodists were 'absent in most of

Methodism today,' and renewed his call to radical discipleship.[589] But it was not as though Methodists were retreating from the world of experience – quite the contrary. Many Methodists, including Davies, were being renewed through an experience of being filled by the Spirit, as Charismatic renewal swept across the churches. As a leading exponent of Charismatic renewal within Methodism, Davies helped resolve the long-standing tensions surrounding the interpretation of the holiness tradition at Cliff, advancing 'the view that the Charismatic movement had overtaken holiness teaching.'[590] As Mellor explains, Davies believed that the language of 'Second Blessing' had been superseded by the new experience of 'Baptism in the Spirit.'[591] As this interpretation became the settled understanding at Cliff, the term 'second blessing disappeared entirely and instead students and staff sought and preached the experience of "being filled with the Spirit", being "open" to the Spirit.'[592] The same was true at Southport, where, as Bebbington observes, 'the raised hands of the worshipping congregation bore witness to the confluence of charismatic renewal with the holiness stream.'[593] This signalled the demise of the holiness tradition within wider Methodism, coming from the one quarter – Cliff and Southport – that had consistently advocated its particular interpretation throughout the twentieth century. It is significant that Davies wrote his doctoral thesis on John Fletcher, who first coined the phrase, 'the baptism of the Spirit.'[594] In this way, Fletcher not only provided the pathway to the reinterpretation of Wesleyan holiness in Pentecostal terms, but also for its demise.

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[589] John J. Vincent, *OK, Let's be Methodists* (London: Epworth Press, 1984), pp. 6-7.
[590] Mellor, 'Mission Theology and Praxis at Cliff College,' p. 106.
[591] Ibid., p. 102.
[592] Ibid.
[593] David W. Bebbington, 'Holiness Movements in British and Canadian Methodism: The Wesley Historical Society Lecture 1996,' *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 50, no. 6 (1996): p. 228.
[594] Mellor, 'Mission Theology and Praxis at Cliff College,' p. 54.

Yet Davies (and Fletcher) may also provide a way forward, particularly in regard to the problematic relationship between gradual growth and claims to instantaneous attainment of perfection. Recalling Fletcher's claim that he had 'received this blessing four or five times before; but lost it,' Davies proposes that this is 'true to life.'

> Many Christians will testify that there have been moments in time when, knowing themselves forgiven and cleansed by God, they have so experienced the Spirit's presence, that they truly loved God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength and their neighbours as themselves... It does seem that such instantaneous experiences do happen, but these are not usually enduring and are, in fact, part of the longer process of change.[595]

Here, Davies decouples the profound experiences of the Spirit that Christians have from claims to perfection, suggesting instead that these experiences point us towards the goal of perfect love and nurture that love within us, transcending arguments about perfection as 'event' or 'process.'

> Whether the growth Christians experience is by a series of crises, or whether it is gradual, the work of changing a person to become Christ-like in every way possible, is that of the Spirit of God… [who] is not limited to a particular way for effecting transformation of character. He may work through crisis experiences or through steady improvement or a combination of both.[596]

For all that is positive in Davies's reinterpretation of the tradition, the truth is that without the framework of holiness, the tradition could not be sustained. Subsuming it within Charismatic experience meant that once again, as with holiness revivalism, the emphasis fell on the experience itself rather than on growth in Christ-like living. For all the good that has come from Charismatic renewal, it cannot be claimed that the Christ-like life has been the main focus of its undoubted contribution. What is missing is Wesley's formational understanding and his emphasis on the means of grace. This

[595] William R. Davies, *Spirit Without Measure: Charismatic Faith and Practice* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1996), p. 104.
[596] Ibid., pp. 104-5.

undergirds the terminology of holiness from which Davies would have us too easily depart, even though Davies does provide pointers to retrieving the tradition by continuing to highlight the importance of experience in our Christian growth.

Judged against Rupert Davies' benchmark that the post-war period 'be viewed as attempts, some successful and some not, to weave again the fabric of Church life and thought, with a proper sense of continuity with the past, but with an equal sense of the newness and urgency of the modern situation,' the efforts in respect of the holiness tradition must be reckoned as unsuccessful.[597] The terminology of 'holiness' had become problematic and it began to disappear from Methodist discourse. A study of the Index to the Agendas of the Methodist Conference 1932–1996, reveals only one reference to 'Christian perfection' – a 1959 memorial calling for 'the serious study of "The Significant Methodist Doctrine"' – with no references to either 'holiness,' or 'sanctification' over the sixty-four year period, a further indication of the effective 'loss' of the tradition in post-war Methodism.[598] At the end of the century, referring to the book, *Holiness* (1981), by Catholic layman, Donald Nicholl, Wakefield was prompted to ask, 'Why have Flew and Sangster been ignored and Wesley's 'grand depositum' of Christian perfection been more faithfully taught by those outside modern Methodism?[599]

In conclusion, it is interesting to reflect that in 1963, as Methodists abandoned their tradition, failing to connect with its relevance, Thomas Merton published *Life and*

[597] Rupert E. Davies, *Methodism*, 3rd ed. (London: Epworth Press, 1985), pp. 162-3.
[598] This Index (Vol. 1) was produced by Brian Beck in 2002. It is held at Methodist Church House, London. For the memorial see Manchester (South-East) Quarterly Meeting. '"The Significant Methodist Doctrine",' in *Methodist Conference Agenda 1959* (The Methodist Church, 1959), p. 540.
[599] Wakefield, *Methodist Spirituality*, p. 88.

Holiness, in which he explicitly advocated holiness as a Christ-centred, world-engaging, and graciously empowered spirituality for the times.[600] 'Christian holiness in our age,' wrote Merton, 'means more than ever the awareness of our common responsibility to cooperate with the mysterious designs of God for the human race.'[601] Like Wesley, Merton encouraged all to have perfect love as their goal:

> 'Hence it is that he who loves God, and seeks the glory of God, seeks to become, by God's grace, perfect in love, as the "heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48).[602]

Methodists, of course, were equally committed to the challenges of the times, determined to reflect God's love and grace in the world, and in doing so exhibited an essential component of their tradition. However, in their desire to be contemporary, they neglected the rich resources their tradition offered for the formational task to which they, like Merton and many Christians, aspired: becoming channels of Christ's holy love in the world.

[600] Thomas Merton, *Life and Holiness* (New York: Doubleday, 1996).
[601] Ibid., p. 10.
[602] Ibid., p. 26.

4 The Recovery of a Tradition

> To be conformed to the image of Christ is not an ideal to be striven after. It is not as though we had to imitate him as well as we could. We cannot transform ourselves into his image; it is rather the form of Christ which seeks to be formed in us (Gal. 4:19), and to be manifested in us. Christ's work is not finished until he has perfected his own form in us. We must be assimilated to the form of Christ in its entirety, the form of Christ incarnate, crucified and glorified.
>
> Dietrich Bonhoeffer[603]

The recovery of a 'lost' tradition is fraught with problems, none more so than the problem of history. An historian would rightly baulk at the suggestion that a particular expression of religious faith and practice, such as the early Wesleyan holiness tradition, might be transplanted from its eighteenth-century world and successfully established in our contemporary context. That is not the way history or tradition work. Both are concerned with the flux of life, and, as Heraclitus reminds us, you cannot step into the same river twice. A tradition is a living and vital set of beliefs and practices whose transmission requires fresh expression within history's changing course. The attempt to capture and preserve it turns tradition into traditionalism, as Jaroslav Pelikan cautions:

> Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And, I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name.[604]

It might be argued that this has been the fate of the early Wesleyan holiness tradition. Therefore, as we assess its potential for retrieval, we must be clear that what we seek to retrieve is not a pristine image of what it once was, like a factory reset of a faulty

[603] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: SCM Press, 1959), p. 272.
[604] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The vindication of tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 65.

computer, but the essence of the tradition: that which inspired its reception, enlivening those whose lives it shaped, who themselves influenced and encouraged others in pursuit of holiness of heart and life, in response to God's grace, experienced with such immediacy.

Our concern then is with the dynamic of the tradition – a dynamic framed within the context of Wesley's Trinitarian theological vision that anticipates our renewal in the divine image (*imago Dei*). It is a teleological dynamic, setting Christ-like love of God and neighbour as the goal of the Christian life. It is a communal dynamic, envisaging personal transformation within the community of faith through engaged participation in the means of grace that God has provided to that end. It is a responsive dynamic – not imposed, but inviting free response. It is a vocational dynamic, summoning us to participate in God's redemptive purposes of love in the world. It is a demonstrable dynamic, seen in inspirational lives that reveal God's love. It is an affectional dynamic – a dynamic of the heart – in which God's extravagant grace invites wholehearted devotion to Christ, 'walking as he walked' along the way of happiness and holiness. This is the dynamic that I contend is the essence of the early Wesleyan holiness tradition – a dynamic which has profound resonance with contemporary perspectives on Christian formation.

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. First, to demonstrate the resonance that the early Wesleyan holiness tradition has with contemporary Christian formation, helping us reconnect with Wesley's world, not least in overcoming the fissure created by the Enlightenment that obscured subsequent expressions of the tradition. Second, to provide contemporary examples of the re-appropriation of holiness terminology and

practice, both within and beyond Methodism, which indicate a basis for retrieval. Finally, to suggest how Methodism might recover its founding tradition and missional purpose so that holiness re-captures the imagination of the Methodist people, informing their practice of Christian formation and participation in God's mission.

4.1 Holiness and Christian formation: new perspectives for re-engagement

Recovering a 'lost' tradition is likely to be more productive if the circumstances in which it takes place afford fresh potential for retrieval. Like a withered shrub that requires re-planting in fresh soil, rich in nutrients, if it is to flourish again. Happily, in the case of the early Wesleyan holiness tradition, there have been important developments in Christian formation in recent years that offer fertile ground for re-engagement and the re-establishment of the wilted holiness plant. Whilst these developments occur across a range of disciplines, particularly, moral philosophy, theological ethics, theology, and Christian education, they coalesce around key themes that resonate with the early Wesleyan holiness tradition and which are themselves responses to the challenges presented by late modernity. These themes include the rehabilitation of the virtue tradition with its teleological perspective, the formational role of the church, the vocation to participate in God's redemptive purposes, an appreciation of the role of the affections, and the importance of Christian practices as means of grace. Taken together, they provide the basis for a distinctive vision of the Christian life, viewed in terms of growth and transformation, that echo the Wesleyan holiness tradition. These themes owe their genesis to a diverse range of thinkers, but

especially to moral philosopher, Alasdair MacIntyre, whose book, *After Virtue*,[605] published in 1981, played a seminal role in the recovery of the Aristotelian tradition of the virtues.

Virtue and character

MacIntyre's significance lies in his influential critique of the Enlightenment's attempt to base morality on universal principles, set free from tradition, to which all reasonable persons can agree – a project he regards as having failed, given the 'interminability' of moral disputes that defy resolution other than by the most vociferous and powerful voices dominating and prevailing above the cacophony of moral chatter that constitutes the current malaise. MacIntyre attributes this failure to the false notion of an autonomous human reason that can be abstracted from social, cultural and historical contingencies, whereas it is this very embeddedness that is necessary for understanding how our moral lives are formed. 'What the Enlightenment made us for the most part blind to and what we now need to recover,' writes MacIntyre, 'is a conception of rational enquiry as embodied in a tradition.'[606] And the tradition to which MacIntyre returns to help late modernity in its moral quest is the Aristotelian tradition of the virtues, reworked by Thomas Aquinas – a tradition which has undergirded the moral life of Western society since classical times.

The outcome of MacIntyre's deliberations is the rehabilitation of the virtue tradition with its emphasis on the formation of character, the virtues being, as Thomas Aquinas

[605] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (London: Duckworth, 2007).
[606] *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 7.

puts it, 'dispositions to act well.'[607] Character formation takes place within communities, whose social activities and practices provide the context in which the virtues are exhibited, and standards of excellence are valued and pursued. Through participation in the life of communities, individuals become 'bearers of a tradition,'[608] rooted in the story or narrative of the community that is shaping them, even as they contribute to its ongoing development, learning from those who have already achieved or are on the way to excellence. Essential to the virtues is the concept of *telos*, the end and purpose towards which human life aspires. Aristotle names this good, *eudaimonia*, which MacIntyre translates as, 'blessedness, happiness, prosperity.'[609] Initially MacIntyre proposes this good 'in social terms,…of practices, traditions, and the narrative unity of human lives,' but later offers a theistic account in the manner of Aquinas.[610]

MacIntyre's work is important for our project, not only because he reminds us of the importance of tradition, but because he rehabilitates the tradition of the virtues in which the Wesleyan tradition was rooted. In so doing, MacIntyre provides the 'good soil' into which the early Wesleyan holiness tradition may potentially be successfully re-introduced. MacIntyre has also influenced numerous Christian theologians and educators who have re-introduced the insights of the virtue tradition into the church informing its understanding of Christian formation, none more so than American theological ethicist, Stanley Hauerwas.

[607] Neil Messer, *SCM Studyguide to Christian Ethics.* (London: SCM Press, 2006), p. 127.
[608] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 221.
[609] Ibid., p. 148.
[610] Ibid., pp. viii-ix.

Stanley Hauerwas

Raised a Methodist, Hauerwas shares MacIntyre's critique of post-Enlightenment ethics, based on the 'allegedly rational individual who stands alone and decides and chooses.'[611] Concerned that the Church has succumbed to its influence, its moral life indistinct from the surrounding culture, Hauerwas contends that 'the most important social task of Christians is to be nothing less than a community capable of forming people with virtues sufficient to witness to God's truth in the world.'[612] For Hauerwas Christian belief informs Christian living, and the truthfulness of those beliefs are evidenced in the quality of the lives that they produce. This is not surprising, given his Methodist background and the affinity he displays towards the core of the Wesleyan tradition: the emphasis on sanctification and Christian perfection.

In 1975, when Wesleyan holiness was on the demise in Britain, Hauerwas was mining the tradition, preparing the ground for its retrieval. In *Character and the Christian Life,*[613] like MacIntyre, Hauerwas returns to the Aristotelian tradition of the virtues to focus on the character of the moral agent as fundamental to moral deliberation. Hauerwas states that character 'implies more than…knowing what is right,' but having the capacity to do it, something that is only acquired 'through activity and by a long and gradual growth.'[614] To say that someone has character suggests that a person has 'acquired certain kinds of habits called virtues.'[615] Likening this to Wesley's emphasis

[611] Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 79.
[612] Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 3.
[613] *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985).
[614] Ibid., p. 68.
[615] Ibid., p. 69.

on 'progressive growth in holiness'[616] Hauerwas connects the 'ethics of character' with the doctrine of sanctification, making the same connection between the holiness tradition and Christian formation for which I argue: 'Sanctification,' is best 'understood as the formation of character.'[617]

Character, according to Hauerwas, 'is the basic aspect of our existence' that 'determines the primary orientation and direction which we embody in our beliefs and actions.'[618] Thus 'To be sanctified is to have our character determined by our basic commitments and beliefs about God.'[619] Understanding sanctification in terms of character, Hauerwas offers a fresh perspective on Wesley's doctrine, casting new light on one of its most thorny issues – the matter of works. What we are and what we do cannot be separated – together they constitute our character.

> Sanctification is not a mysterious process that occurs behind or apart from our actual behaviour but is worked out in and through our beliefs and actions. Our works are important not because they are an outgrowth of our character…but because works are an integral aspect of what it means to have any character at all, for it is through action that we commit ourselves to being one way rather than another.[620]

The concept of character also rescues sanctification from the charge of legalism, 'a kind of program that can be followed by adhering to certain beliefs and doing certain acts.'[621] Sanctification as a depiction of the Christian life is therefore neither a mysterious change unrelated to actual everyday behaviour nor a change automatically effected by adhering to rules, but a matter of having 'one's character determined in

[616] Ibid., p. 218.
[617] Ibid., p. 224.
[618] Ibid., p. 203.
[619] Ibid.
[620] Ibid., p. 207.
[621] Ibid., p. 227.

accordance with God's action in Jesus Christ.'[622] And though Hauerwas does not often refer to the role of grace, or the work of the Holy Spirit, he is clear, as Sam Wells points out, that 'Moral formation is something that is primarily received rather than attained.'[623]

In a recent essay, co-authored with Stephen Long, Hauerwas considers the goal of the Christian life, and Wesley's 'insistence that there is an essential connection between happiness and holiness.'[624] Noticing that Wesley followed Augustine and Aquinas in turning to the Sermon on the Mount to depict 'what Methodist tradition calls this life of beatitude,'[625] Hauerwas claims that Wesley stands, therefore, 'in the central stream of the Christian tradition [by] refusing to separate happiness from holiness.'[626]

> Wesley's account of the beatitudes, therefore, locates him in the great catholic tradition of the virtues as crucial for the formation of a holy people. The virtues are habits that form our passions and direct our desires and actions towards their true end: the goodness of God. Christian tradition does not dispense with the natural virtues for the human ethical life, but it does resituate them. We cultivate virtues within the context of communities that form our character.[627]

Whilst Hauerwas remains concerned about the way Methodists have given external shape to this life of holiness and happiness, turning it into a private piety or legalistic moralism, he appears committed to Methodism's originating vision, that Christians 'can bear witness to God's gift that sanctifies us into God's own perfection.'[628] And whilst he wishes that 'Wesley might have hit upon a less troublesome notion than "perfection" in order to express his convictions about the necessity of continued

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[622] Ibid.
[623] Samuel Wells, *Transforming Fate into Destiny: The Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2004), p. 46.
[624] Long and Hauerwas, 'Theological Ethics,' p. 635.
[625] Ibid., p. 637.
[626] Ibid., p. 638.
[627] Ibid.
[628] Ibid., pp. 644-5.

growth in the Christian life,'[629] Hauerwas prefers to stay with the traditional terminology rather than update it with such terms as 'maturing' or 'wholeness,' arguing that 'perfection names the *telos* any adequate account of the Christian life requires.'[630] In this, Hauerwas remains a true Wesleyan, for as he once put it, 'some of us continue to count ourselves Methodists because we cannot deny that God, through this company, as accommodated as it may be, put us on the road toward perfection.'[631]

The theological ethics of Stanley Hauerwas offers a fresh perspective from which to re-engage with Methodism's lost tradition. By locating Wesley and his understanding of holiness within 'the great catholic tradition of the virtues,' and explicating sanctification as the formation of character, Hauerwas provides grounds for the retrieval of the early Wesleyan holiness tradition.

Community

Central to Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics is the formational role of the church: 'There can be no sanctification of individuals without a sanctified people.'[632] Supporting Hauerwas's view is Reformed theologian, David Fergusson, who, in his positive reconsideration of the doctrine of sanctification, argues that in 'an increasingly fragmented culture, sanctification needs to be set within an account of the church as a community of moral and spiritual formation.'[633] Moreover, he likens Hauerwas's

[629] Stanley Hauerwas, 'Characterizing Perfection: Second Thoughts on Character and Sanctification,' in *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), p. 124.
[630] Ibid., p. 142.
[631] Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), p. 11.
[632] *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1983), p. 97.
[633] David Fergusson, 'Reclaiming the Doctrine of Sanctification,' *Interpretation* 53, no. 4 (1999): p. 380.

'stress upon the ecclesial community as the locus for forming a people who can know and confess Christ in a life of discipleship [as] reminiscent of Bonhoeffer.'[634]

The church as a community of formation is a concept particularly addressed in the field of Christian education. Among the most prominent exponents are John Westerhoff, Thomas Groome, Maria Harris, James Fowler, and Craig Dykstra, all of whom appear to have been influenced by the rehabilitation of virtue ethics, viewing Christian education as the formation of persons rather than the imparting of knowledge. Their work resonates with the early Wesleyan holiness tradition, as evidenced for example in Westerhoff's ground-breaking book, *Will Our Children Have Faith* (1976), with its model of 'enculturation,' and emphasis on formation in community.[635]

John Westerhoff

Sharing Hauerwas's concern that the distinctive Christian voice is not lost in a diverse and secular culture whose beliefs and values no longer coincide with those of the church, Westerhoff alerts us to how enculturation affects us all, as it takes place in unsought and unnoticed ways by virtue of our being part of society. 'Enculturation is a natural process of formal and informal, intentional and unintentional means by which persons are integrated into a social group and acquire its culture, that is, its learned, shared understandings and ways of life.'[636] Hence Westerhoff argues for the importance of Christian formation to shape our lives in a Christian direction, describing it as 'an intentional process of initiation and incorporation into a Christian faith

[634] Ibid., p. 387.
[635] John H. Westerhoff, III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, Revised and Expanded ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2000).
[636] John Westerhoff, 'Formation, Education, Instruction,' in *Critical Perspectives on Christian Education: A Reader on the aims, principles and philosophy of Christian education*, ed. Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis, (Leominster: Gracewing, 1994), p. 67.

community with distinctive understandings and ways of life which differentiate it from the general culture.[637] Like Hauerwas, Westerhoff recognises that the church's distinctive set of beliefs and practices play a vital role in shaping Christian lives, and calls the church to an 'intentional' program of educational and formational activity to that end. Citing Tertullian – 'Christians are made, not born' – Westerhoff, like Lindbeck,[638] advocates a return to something akin to the catechetical practices of the early church:

> I am…committed to the word catechesis to indicate all intentional learning within a community of Christian faith and life. We are made *a* Christian at our baptism. We spend the rest of our lives involved in a process of becoming more Christian. That lifelong process is one of catechesis.[639]

Westerhoff reminds us that the catechumenate was important in the early church to establish new Christians in a worldview and value system radically different from the surrounding culture. It was 'a formation process' based on an apprenticeship model, 'in which persons apprenticed themselves to the community and participated in its life accompanied by a sponsor who represented a community.'[640]

> Through this process the catechumen, the enquiring Christian, travelled through the community's yearly cycle so as to make its story their story; shared in a ministry of reconciliation, healing, and service by caring for the sick, hurt, prisoner, orphan and lonely, and developed an intimate relationship to God by practicing the disciplines of prayer and discernment.[641]

The intentionality of the catechumenate model may be compared with Wesley's system of communal formation. Wesley was intentional in establishing a structure to provide the right environment for people, most of whom did not share the culture of

[637] Ibid.
[638] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 132.
[639] Westerhoff, 'Formation, Education, Instruction,' p. 63.
[640] Ibid., p. 68.
[641] Ibid., pp. 68-9.

the church, to journey into a life of faith and holiness. 'Enculturation' took place within the society, class, and band. The model of apprenticeship may be compared to the role of class leaders as wise mentors to would-be disciples, or to the bands, where co-mentorship operated as members watched over one another in love. Wesley, it seems, knew instinctively the value of formation in community, something that we need to regain and for which the tradition offers resources.

No matter how good the 'formational' system, however, as Westerhoff reminds us, there is no 'guarantee that a person will grow up Christian.'[642] What an intentional system of formation offers is the possibility of making a free and an informed decision.[643] This recognition accords with Wesley's emphasis on human freedom when it comes to our response to God's grace. Whilst salvation is offered to all, the outcome is not predetermined, but awaits a positive response. Wesley's trust, however, was not in the system he devised but in the prevenient grace of God. The society, class, and band provided the means by which persons could journey into and onward in the life of faith, precisely because they provided a vital setting in which God's grace could touch lives and, by free response, transform them.

Maria Harris

Taking Westerhoff's model of enculturation and catechesis as her starting point, Roman Catholic educator, Maria Harris, in *Fashion Me a People*, offers a rich and stimulating understanding of the formational role of the Christian community, as she broadens our understanding of the nature and content of the church's curriculum,

[642] Ibid., p. 71.
[643] Ibid.

from a narrow focus on subject matter to 'the practice of seeing all the aspects of church life as educative and educating.'[644] On this basis, Harris argues, 'the church does not have an educational program; it is an educational program,' in which church members are both fashioned by, and fashioners of 'the set of forms "traditioned" to us through the centuries by the Christian church… that, taken together, comprise the curriculum of the church.[645] Harris identifies these as the five ecclesial 'forms' in Acts 2:42, 44-47 which comprise 'the classical activities of ecclesial ministry' that require fashioning anew in each generation. This results in both a refashioned tradition and the fashioning of the fashioners themselves:

- To *koinonia* (community and communion)
- To *leiturgia* (worship and prayer)
- To *kerygma* (proclaiming the word of God)
- To *diakonia* (service and outreach)
- To *didache* (teaching and learning)[646]

All five 'forms' are equally needed, if the refashioning of the tradition is to give balanced expression.[647] Whilst John Wesley did not describe his system of communal formation in such 'artistic' terms, we can see how he worked with these same 'forms' as Methodists were fashioned by, and helped fashion: *koinonia* in the fellowship of society, class, and band; *leiturgia* in the services, sacraments, and love-feasts; *kerygma* in preaching and testimony; *diakonia* in concern and care towards others, especially the needy; and *didache* in their teaching, reading, and learning. Wesley, like Harris, recognised the vital gift that we are to one another as we share in our formation together as God's people.

[644] Maria Harris, *Fashion Me A People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), p. 59.
[645] Ibid., p. 16.
[646] Ibid., p. 17.
[647] Ibid., pp. 43-4.

Vocation and Affection

A significant contribution to the development of this broad and holistic understanding of Christian formation has been made by James Fowler, particularly in respect of Christian vocation and the importance of the affections, so critical to Wesley's understanding.

With a background in both developmental psychology and theology, in *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, Fowler considers the search for personal fulfilment and 'how communities of shared faith can provide support and nurture for people as they shape themselves, and are shaped, in spirit and faith.'[648] To do so he employs the language of vocation, described by Walter Brueggemann as '*finding a purpose for one's life that is part of the purposes of God,'*[649] and defined by Fowler as:

> …a total response of the self to the address of God [that] involves the orchestration of our leisure, our relationships, our work, our private life, our public life, and the resources we steward, so as to put it all at the disposal of God's purposes in the services of God and neighbour.[650]

Vocation

Fowler explains that the purpose of his project is to counter 'the individualistic assumption that we are or can be self-grounded persons… that we have within us – and are totally responsible for generating from within ourselves – all the resources out of which to create a fulfilled and self-actualized life.'[651] Wesley shared Fowler's concern. His field preaching, for example, was designed to 'awaken' his self-sufficient hearers into a relational understanding of human existence that they might love God

[648] James W. Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), p. vii.
[649] Ibid.
[650] Ibid., p. 77.
[651] Ibid., pp. 82-3.

and neighbour. Fowler similarly addresses the contemporary emphasis on self-actualisation and self-fulfilment by proposing – as, it might be said, Wesley did before him – the Christian's vocation to 'personhood in relationships.'

> There is no personal fulfilment that is not part of communal fulfilment. We find ourselves by giving ourselves. We become larger persons by devoting ourselves to the pursuit of the common good. From the standpoint of vocation, fulfilment, self-actualization, and excellence of being are by-products of covenant faithfulness and action in the service of God and neighbour.[652]

Fowler finds this vocation expressed in Biblical terms in Ephesians 4:13, where 'the goal of our development' is represented 'in a mature personhood' measured by the stature of Christ, 'a gift… a by-product of faithful response to the faithful love of God.'[653] Such Christ-like maturity is the 'transformation from self-groundedness toward vocation.'[654] The significance of Fowler's vocational and relational account of Christian development is that it accords with the Wesleyan ideal of gradual growth in perfect love of God and neighbour. Love of God is not to be separated from love of neighbour, for to love God is to participate in God's love for the neighbour. The vocation to holiness of heart and life leads us into the world, which, as we have noted, is vital for any credible retrieval of Wesleyan holiness.

We find this same focus in the work of Catholic educationalist, Thomas Groome,[655] whose 'way of shared praxis' understands the purpose of Christian education as the promotion of *lived* faith, with the reign of God as its ultimate *telos*, thereby placing the

[652] Ibid., p. 83.
[653] Ibid.
[654] Ibid., p. 114.
[655] Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry – The Way of Shared Praxis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998).

formational goal of the individual within the context of God's redemptive purposes for all creation in Christ.

> *Lived* Christian faith... is a holistic affair that engages the whole of people's "beings": their bodily, mental, and volitional capacities; their heads, hearts, and life-styles; cognition, desire, and action; understanding, relationship, and service… a threefold dynamic of historical activities: *believing*, *trusting*, and *doing* God's will.[656]

Once again, we are reminded of Wesley's formational theology and how it similarly engaged 'heads,' 'hearts,' and 'lifestyles.' Particularly striking is Groome's reference to 'trusting' or the 'heart' as the affective/relational dimension to Christian faith by which we 'become ever more deeply in love with and trusting of the One who is Love and who is most to be trusted.'[657] This echoes Wesley's understanding of the affectional side of our nature for formation in perfect love, fundamental to Wesley's 'religion of the heart,' and lost to his successors. To see the affective side of our nature informing the work of a leading exponent of Christian formation is an encouraging sign for the retrieval of the tradition. And Groome is not alone – Fowler shares his conviction.

Affection

Fowler's understanding of personal transformation identifies five 'interrelated, integrated,…analytically separable levels of meaning and orientation by which communities of faith form persons and groups for vocational existence:'

1. The provision and instantiation of a shared core story.
2. A participation in and life-prioritizing identification with the central passion of the shared core narrative.
3. A formation of the affections – a person's deep and guiding emotions, the wellsprings of his or her motivation – in accordance with the community's identification with its central passion.
4. The generation of the virtues – moral strengths and actional skills that become consistent, constituent dimensions of personal and corporate action.

[656] Ibid., p. 18.
[657] Ibid., p. 20.

5. The practical and particular shape of worldly vocation in each life in the community, and their interrelatedness in mission and mutual support as a unified but highly varied ecology of vocation.[658]

What is so striking about Fowler's understanding of Christian formation in community is the weight he attaches to 'the generation of the virtues' and the 'formation of the affections.' Virtue and affection are two vital, yet 'lost' aspects of the early Wesleyan holiness tradition that Fowler retrieves and claims to be essential if the church is to help persons grow, develop, and flourish as Christians. Moreover, they are integrally related since the virtues are the 'strengths of perception, judgement, and action that… give tensile character to the affections,' leading Fowler to call for the church to take seriously the 'formation of the affections,' because 'these deep dispositions of the heart, are by-products and results of people's responsiveness to the love and action of God'[659] – a statement that could have come from Wesley.

The affections, the virtues, and the three other constituents of Fowler's system, form the pathway for personal transformation, a journey from 'self-groundedness' to 'vocational existence' – a process of 'conversion,' understood as more than a once and for all experience, that summarises Fowler's thought:

> …by conversion I mean an *ongoing process* – with, of course, a series of important moments of perspective-altering convictions and illuminations – *through which people (or a group) gradually bring the lived story of their lives into congruence with the core story of the Christian faith*… Conversion means a recentering of our passion…making an attachment to the passion of Jesus Christ… Conversion means a realignment of our affections, the restructuring of our virtues, and the growth in lucidity and power of our partnership with God's work in the world.[660]

[658] Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, pp. 93-4.
[659] Ibid.
[660] Ibid., p. 115.

That a leading developmental psychologist should attach such importance to a key, yet neglected, aspect of Wesley's world is profoundly significant. Fowler re-appropriates the moral psychology that informed the early Wesleyan holiness tradition, indicating that something akin to this affectional account of the shaping of the Christian life towards its true end in God is urgently needed in our time. This is precisely the contention of Maddox, who, as already noted, argues that the affections were displaced from their central role in Wesleyan holiness as a result of Enlightenment pressures, thereby undermining and rendering unintelligible a full appreciation of Wesley's rich account of the means by which Christians may aspire to and realise holiness of heart and life.[661] Fowler and Groome demonstrate that contemporary exponents of Christian formation now recognise the vital role of the affections for Christian formation. The Methodist Church has only to look to its founding tradition to find that same emphasis.

There is an addendum. Fowler views personal transformation as ultimately a work of God's grace, finding resonance between his theory and the 'spiritual traditions' of both the Eastern and Western churches, where the concept of the development and transformation of the person is effected in partnership with God.[662] Whilst favouring the Eastern recognition of human potentiality over the Western emphasis on 'the depths and inescapability of our fallenness,' Fowler values the contribution of those thinkers – and Wesley would be one of them – who have taught 'the *sanctifying* work of God's grace.'[663] This leads Fowler to suggest that 'in our present situation of confusion and ferment regarding images of human wholeness and completion, we are

[661] Maddox, 'Reconnecting the Means to the End,' p. 63.
[662] Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, p. 115.
[663] Ibid., p. 116.

in *critical* need of a theory of transformation and development that takes account of the power and availability to us of the synergy of God's grace.'[664] Thankfully, there are those who are engaging in just this vital task, and in so doing support the general thrust of my argument that there is a need for the church to pay greater attention to the transformational work of God in shaping our lives toward Christ-like living.

Christian practices and the means of grace

The formational importance of Christian practices and an appreciation of them as a means of grace is the vital contribution of Christian educationalist, and Presbyterian practical theologian, Craig Dykstra, lending further support to my argument that the Wesleyan holiness tradition has much to offer in informing the church's understanding of Christian formation. Influenced by MacIntyre's work on social practices and Hauerwas's on the church, Dykstra's thought developed working alongside Dorothy Bass and others in writing *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* and in establishing the 'Valparaiso Project on the Education and Formation of People in Faith.'[665]

Dykstra's advocacy of Christian practices emerges from his concern to understand 'what it means for people to be formed in faith as Christians and how that happens,' a question he addresses as early as 1985, highlighting the importance of 'participation' in Christian formation.[666] Participation requires a context, and that context is the

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[664] Ibid.

[665] See: Dorothy C. Bass, ed. *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), p. xxvii. And, Craig R. Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), p. xiv. Dykstra defines a *practice* as 'an ongoing, shared activity of a community of people that partly defines and partly makes them who they are.' ibid., p. 48.

[666] Craig R. Dykstra, 'No longer strangers: the church and its educational ministry,' in *Theological Perspectives on Christian Formation: A reader on theology and Christian education*, ed. Jeff Astley, Leslie

community of the church, hence Dykstra's assertion that 'growing in faith involves the deepening and widening of our participation in the church, and in its forms of life.'[667] Citing Hauerwas's description of the church as a 'story-formed' community,[668] Dykstra argues that the Christian story proves formational as 'we come to think, believe and behave by means of it' through active participation in the practices of the church, which are themselves shaped by that story.[669]

Whilst Christian formation involves action, however, it is not blind action – it must be accompanied by our willingness to grow.

> 'Growing in faith… does not just happen because we will or intend it. But it does not happen without our willing and intending either. These are both involved and required. Growth in faith requires that we be active, and activity means that, in part, we do and will the action.'[670]

This reflects, what Maddox terms, Wesley's 'responsible grace,' in which our active response to God's grace is essential, because grace is not irresistible. On this basis, Dykstra argues that growth in the Christian life…

> …involves active engagement in certain *practices* which are central to and constitutive of the church's life. By engaging in these practices with others, we both lay ourselves open to what God is doing redemptively in the world and participate in that activity ourselves.[671]

Amongst the twelve formative practices that Dykstra details are: telling and interpreting the Christian story, worshipping, praying, confessing, forgiving, reconciling and being reconciled, acts of faithful service and witness, suffering for and with others, offering hospitality and resisting destructive powers and patterns both in the world

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J. Francis, and Colin Crowder, (Leominster: Gracewing, 1996), p. 106. Originally published in *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* (1985).

[667] Ibid., p. 114.

[668] Ibid., p. 110.

[669] Ibid., pp. 111-12.

[670] Ibid., p. 114.

[671] Ibid.

and church.[672] It is through active participation in such practices that we come to make them our own and growth takes place and we become 'more able to sustain and initiate these activities ourselves in relation to others.'[673] Dykstra argues that many of these practices 'must be learned' and require 'direct, intentional teaching' because of their historical, communal, difficult, and countercultural nature, and therefore calls the church to this vital educational and formational task.[674]

What makes Dykstra so relevant is the way in which, in his later work, he explicitly refers to Christian practices as 'means of grace,' even describing our participation in them as 'Christ's living work' and at 'the heart of what is conveyed by the biblical word *sanctification*.'[675] Explaining this view, and echoing, yet not referencing Wesley, for whom the 'means of grace' were pivotal to his understanding of sanctification, Dykstra records how 'over the course of its history,' the church has 'learned to depend on the efficacy of certain central practices and disciplines in nurturing faith and growth in the life of faith.'[676]

> At the same time, the tradition has avoided any sort of causal understanding of the relationship between these practices and faith. Participating in the disciplines of the church does not bring about or cause faith or growth in the life of faith. Rather, engagement in the church's practices puts us in a position where we may recognize and participate in the work of God's grace in the world. This is precisely what we do when we "make diligent use of the means of grace." By active

[672] Ibid., pp. 114-15. Dykstra acknowledges that John Westerhoff provided the stimulus for this list. In 2005, Dykstra modifies and adds to it, including: giving generously, struggling to understand the context in which we life, and 'working together to maintain and create social structures and institutions that will sustain life in the world in ways that accord with God's will.' Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith*, pp. 42-3. The list is significantly different in his work with Dorothy Bass: 'Honouring the body. Hospitality. Household economics. Saying yes and saying no. Keeping Sabbath. Testimony. Discernment. Shaping communities. Forgiveness. Healing. Dying well. Singing our lives…' Bass, *Practicing Our Faith*, p. 5.
[673] Dykstra, 'No Longer Strangers,' p. 115.
[674] Ibid., p. 116. For example: 'The reason why many adults cannot pray is that they have never learned to do it, have never been taught. And some children can pray because (even though they are less mature in other ways, cognitively and socially, for instance) they have learned how to pray; they have been taught.'
[675] Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith*, pp. 40-46, & 27.
[676] Ibid., p. 41.

> participation in practices that are central to the historical life of the community of faith, we place ourselves in the kind of situation in which we know God accomplishes the work of grace.[677]

This aligns with Wesley's view that more is required than rote performance, even when it comes to the instituted and prudential means of grace, both of which can be done with minimal engagement – what is required is the attentiveness to God and openness to the workings of grace, as reflected in his emphasis on the general means of grace.[678] By interpreting Christian practices as means of grace, Dykstra invites us to see how they become 'the human places in which and through which God's people come to faith and grow in maturity in the life of faith.'[679] Moreover, Dykstra suggests that such growth toward Christian maturity 'takes time and experience,' further echoing Wesley's fundamental understanding of holiness as gradual growth.[680]

What prompts Dykstra's explication of Christian practices as means of grace is his concern to overcome what Edward Farley describes as 'the nasty suspicion,' that 'our life together in the church' has 'no grounding beyond our own thinking and doing,' leading to what he sees as 'a kind of practical atheism,' in which 'our practices are nothing more than exercises in technique and management.'[681] Dykstra reverts to the Christian tradition's terminology of the 'means of grace' in order to provide a more substantial and fruitful understanding. 'Can the practices of the church,' he asks, 'enable people to find something and receive something they could not otherwise have experienced, namely, the grace of God and the experience of new life?'[682] Whilst

[677] Ibid., pp. 41-2.
[678] Thompson, 'The General Means of Grace,' p. 252.
[679] Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith*, p. 43.
[680] Ibid., p. 44.
[681] Ibid., pp. 9-10.
[682] Ibid., p. 10.

admitting 'that this is a "very large claim,"' Dykstra believes that, 'In the midst of engagement in these practices, a community comes to such an immediate experience of the grace and mercy and power of God that the "nasty suspicion"… simply loses its power.'[683] This proved true in the experience of Wesley and the early Methodists, where Christian practices – works of piety and mercy – were understood as means of grace, becoming vehicles of growth and transformation toward holiness of heart and life. Dykstra's work suggests that they may do so again through the recovery of this vital aspect of the tradition.

The key themes emerging from these contemporary perspectives on Christian formation have revealed deep resonances with the essential dynamics of the early Wesleyan holiness tradition. The stress on virtue, community, vocation, affection, and Christian practices as means of grace bring essential aspects of Wesley's theology and practice into the twenty-first century, affording us the opportunity to discover their importance afresh. They reveal how Wesley may be considered a pioneer in developing a practical theology and communal system for the purpose of forming persons in Christ-like character for the wider transformation of society. The failure of the Wesleyan holiness project was due to the loss of Wesley's holistic understanding, particularly the role of virtue, affection, and the means of grace. These recent developments invite Methodists to take a more appreciative view of their lost tradition, as they show the prescience Wesley had in relation to Christian formation. His practical theology, therefore, deserves greater respect and attention from a church that has too readily dismissed his relevance to contemporary concerns. There is both

[683] Ibid., p. 53.

the potential and the opportunity for the recovery of the essential dynamics of its lost tradition. And there are small signs that this may be starting to happen.

4.2 Fresh expressions of holiness

It has been noticeable that the terminology of holiness has begun to find its way back into Methodist discourse since I first embarked on this research. Then, references to holiness hardly surfaced within Methodism – the 'Holiness and Risk' conference being an almost solitary exception. However, the emergence of what may be termed, 'fresh expressions' of holiness have been fascinating to observe. Whist instances are few, they signal a greater openness to the terminology of holiness and, perhaps, the recovery of the tradition. Such 'fresh expressions' have emerged from the centre and local levels of the Church, as well as from beyond Methodism.

From the centre

The 2016 Methodist Conference saw the induction of Roger Walton and Rachel Lampard as President and Vice-President of Conference, taking as their theme for the year, 'Holiness and Justice.' Not since Sangster in 1950 had holiness been the focus of a presidential address. It is not hard to see why, as the new President conceded,

> The idea that you will spend the next 30 minutes listening to someone talk about holiness, may not be what you came for… But on my heart is the need to re-discover the centrality of holiness in our life as a church and the need to spread the notion of holiness for others to consider and embrace.[684]

This is an important statement, amounting to a call for the retrieval of Wesleyan holiness, yet Walton is wary of the terminology, recognising that many Methodists will

[684] Roger L. Walton, 'Speaking about holiness in the 21st century,' *The Methodist Recorder*, 8 July 2016, p. 6.

not 'sit easy with the word holiness.'[685] Whilst offering possible alternatives – 'Spiritual Fitness,' 'Wholeness,' 'Resilience' – Walton believes that holiness is 'the word that needs to be at the centre of all our talk of discipleship,' modelling his understanding of it on the 'revealed character of God.'[686]

Walton proposes three way in which it might be nurtured. First, 'by living in the story of God,'[687] thus following Hauerwas and Dykstra, and of course Wesley, who as 'a man of one book' understood the Scriptures to be 'a means of grace,' that helped nurture 'enduring holy tempers.'[688] Second, 'by visiting holy spaces,' a term that I find less than helpful, but which Walton uses to refer to those 'corporate contexts conducive to growth,' including such 'means of grace' as worship, hymn singing, 'prayer, fasting, holy communion and Christian conferring,' and those 'Mission and encounter moments' when God's grace meets us and transforms us, as it did Wesley, while engaging with the poor and campaigning for justice.[689] This echoes Dykstra's emphasis on Christian practices as means of grace. The inclusion of 'Mission and encounter moments' recognises the formational importance of works of mercy as means of grace, as Maddox has shown by reference to Wesley's sermon, *On Zeal*.[690] The relationship between 'holiness and justice' is further explored by Rachel Lampard, Team Leader of the ecumenical Joint Public Issues Team, who argues, in her Conference address, that holiness and justice 'are not polar opposites – the holy huddle versus the activist justice-seeker – but they are inescapably intertwined.'[691]

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[685] Ibid.
[686] Ibid., pp. 6-7.
[687] Ibid., p. 7.
[688] Randy L. Maddox, 'The Rule of Christian Faith, Practice, and Hope: John Wesley on the Bible,' *Methodist Review* Vol. 3 (2011): pp. 32-3.
[689] Walton, 'Speaking about holiness,' pp. 7-8.
[690] Maddox, '"Visit the Poor",' p. 73.
[691] Rachel Lampard, 'A world in need of 'oceans of justice',' *The Methodist Recorder*, 8 July 2016, p. 9.

Finally, Walton highlights the importance of 'intentional and ethical living,' arguing that for faith to be attractive, it must be embodied in actions that witness 'to what we believe.'[692] Here again we have echoes of Hauerwas.

In re-asserting the centrality of holiness to Methodism's ongoing mission, Walton and Lampard may be said to be in the vanguard of its retrieval, though it is hard to judge the extent to which Methodists will respond to their message, given the yearly change of President/Vice-President and their chosen themes, making it difficult to follow through with any consistency. However, Walton and Lampard demonstrate that holiness terminology can be re-appropriated for the twenty-first century, and in linking holiness and justice, they offer an understanding of holiness that engages with the harsh realities of life – a vital step on the road to retrieval.

A further example of re-appropriation from the centre, or at least from beyond the local, can be seen in the decision of Wesley House, Cambridge to name its online journal, launched in 2015, 'Holiness,' something that would have been unthinkable a few years ago.[693] Though the title and content appear to be generic rather than specifically focussed on holiness, it indicates a new willingness in British Methodism to re-engage with its roots in establishing its missional identity. Particularly noteworthy is the statement of purpose, inviting 'ecumenical dialogue on what holy living means in the contemporary world' – a question of vital importance to the retrieval of Wesleyan holiness.[694]

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[692] Walton, 'Speaking about holiness,' p. 8.
[693] 'Holiness: The Journal of Wesley House Cambridge,' Wesley House, Cambridge, http://www.wesley.cam.ac.uk/current-edition/ accessed 01 May 2015.
[694] 'Holiness Journal: Purpose and Ethos,' Wesley House, Cambridge, http://www.wesley.cam.ac.uk/holiness/purpose-and-ethos/ accessed 21 March 2017.

From the local

Advocacy from the centre alone will not be enough. The tradition will require fresh expression at church and circuit level if it is to become embedded in the lives of the Methodist people. Happily, there are two such instances: *The Inspire Movement*[695] and *The Holy Habits Programme*,[696] the former drawing explicitly on the Wesleyan tradition to inform its missional spirituality, the latter finding its impetus in Acts 2.

Inspire

The *Inspire Movement* was co-founded by Philip Meadows, a key speaker at the 'Holiness and Risk' Conference, whose presentation, *The DNA of Methodist Discipleship*, invited reflection on how the Wesleyan holiness gene might inform contemporary discipleship.[697] *Inspire* may be viewed as Meadows' personal and practical response to that question. Launched in 2008 with funding from the Methodist Church, *Inspire* is now self-sustaining, with around 1500 participants drawn from thirty different denominations in 'Britain, Ireland and the USA,' whose aim, as Meadows explains, is:

> …to cultivate a form of Wesleyan missional spirituality, through advocating a Way (or Rule) of Life rooted in the DNA of Wesleyan Discipleship, along with innovation around 'band meeting' as a means of formation to that end.[698]

Although the terminology of discipleship is clearly favoured, as evidenced by the *Inspire* strap-line, 'developing the spiritual life of mission-shaped disciples,' the

[695] 'Inspire,' http://inspiremovement.org accessed 04 April 2016.
[696] 'The Holy Habits Programme,' The Birmingham Methodist Circuit, https://www.birminghammethodistcircuit.org.uk/holy-habits/ accessed 15 June 2016.
[697] See Chapter 2. See also, Philip Meadows, *The Wesleyan DNA of Discipleship: Fresh Expressions of Discipleship for the 21st-century Church* (Grove Books Limited, 2013).
[698] Email to David Mullins, 1 July 2016.

influence of Wesley is unmistakeable and fully acknowledged.[699] Members of the network commit to a Way of Life, pivotal to which is the fellowship band, providing a confidential space for the three or four members as they offer mutual encouragement in their intentional pursuit of holiness of heart and life. Their Way of Life has four core elements: 'Seeking growth in the love of God,' 'Using disciplines as a means of grace,' 'Sharing fellowship with spiritual friends,' and 'Engaging mission through love of neighbour' – all of which reflect Wesley's influence.[700]

What is significant about *Inspire* is that though it shares the concerns of those involved in contemporary mission, its methodology is focussed not on new ways of being church, but on the renewal of historic practice and on the development of holy lives for credible witness.[701] In this way, the *Inspire Movement* is an example of how the tradition may be recovered for the twenty-first century church. However, with Bristol and Chesterfield being the only centres of its work in Britain, it is hard to see how it will flourish without becoming more deeply embedded in the programmes of local churches and without wider promotion across the Church to secure the engagement of ministers and church leaders. Whilst joining the network is easily done via the *Inspire* website, it involves registering a band – a significant commitment that may put off some who otherwise would be interested in exploring further. A gentler introduction to the ideas and practices of *Inspire* might invite greater participation, as would more effective promotion in Britain by the Methodist Church. Those who make their way to

[699] 'Inspire'.
[700] 'Inspire: Missional Discipleship,' https://inspiremovement.org/missional-discipleship/ accessed 02 August 2019.
[701] Philip Meadows, 'Wesleyan Wisdom for Mission-Shaped Discipleship,' *Journal of Missional Practice* Volume 3 (January 2014), http://journalofmissionalpractice.com/wesleyan-wisdom-for-mission-shaped-discipleship/ accessed 06 April 2017.

the *Inspire* website, however, will find details of training retreats that do provide opportunities to learn about the network, ranging from a basic 'Introduction to Inspire,' to a wider programme that includes 'Missional Discipleship,' 'Fellowship Bands,' and 'House Fellowship and Missional Community.'[702]

Holy Habits

The Holy Habits Programme emerges from the life and mission of the Birmingham Methodist circuit, and, since its launch in 2015, has attracted interest within and beyond Methodism, with course booklets – published by the Bible Reading Fellowship – available from the *Holy Habits* website.[703] The inspiration behind *Holy Habits* is Methodist minister, Andrew Roberts, who was invited to provide ideas following a circuit review that 'identified a need to deepen discipleship.'[704] Having previously studied the discipleship practices found in Acts 2:42-47, and referred to 'holy habits' in his revision of the *mission shaped ministry course* when *Fresh Expressions* Director of Training, Roberts proposed 'a programme around the ten holy habits' he had identified:[705] 'biblical teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer, giving, service, eating together, gladness and generosity, worship and the making of more disciples.'[706] The resulting two-year programme involves the study of each habit over an eight-to-ten-week period. Its purpose is to 'give everyone an opportunity to grow in their relationship with God' and 'to challenge' church and circuit culture 'by helping members think through the habits they cultivate in their own lives.'[707]

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[702] 'Inspire: Overview of Curriculum,' https://inspiremovement.org/overview-of-curriculum/#introduction-to-inspire accessed 02 August 2019.
[703] 'Holy Habits,' http://www.holyhabits.co.uk accessed 11 September 2018.
[704] Andrew Roberts, *Holy Habits* ([Welwyn Garden City]: Malcolm Down Publishing, 2016), p. 9.
[705] Ibid.
[706] 'Holy Habits'.
[707] 'Holy Habits Programme'.

Holy Habits is a rare and impressive example of intentional Christian formation being implemented at local level. It indicates a readiness to use the language of holiness, at least in the title. *Holy Habits*, however, is not an attempt to re-appropriate Wesleyan holiness, nor the Aristotelian tradition of the virtues, as the title might suggest.[708] Instead, Roberts confirms that *Holy Habits* emerged from reflection on Acts 2 and the discourse of 'discipleship' and 'mission-shaped church,' with no direct reference to Wesleyan holiness or the virtue tradition.[709] However, there is clearly resonance, particularly in its aims and practices, focussed on Christian growth and transformative mission. Moreover, *Holy Habits* developed within a discourse that benefitted from a wider interaction with some of the perspectives on Christian formation discussed earlier, which I have argued offer fertile ground for the retrieval of the tradition, and of which *Holy Habits* might be viewed as the first shoots. Let me explain.

In formulating its aims, *Holy Habits* returns to the notion of character, which originates in the virtue tradition reintroduced into contemporary discussion by MacIntyre and Hauerwas. This is the context from which both the discipleship discourse and *Holy Habits* emerges, allowing Roberts to describe discipleship as the 'transformation of individuals into the likeness or character of Jesus.'[710] Here he enlists the support of his former Fresh Expressions colleague, Graham Cray, who states that 'Character formation is the object of disciple making. It is achieved through habit, through godly repetition. It involves spiritual disciplines, but also daily obedience to the way of

[708] Andrew Thompson uses the same term, 'holy habits,' independently to refer to 'the means of grace,' in his explication of Wesleyan practices, see Thompson, *The Means of Grace*, p. xix.
[709] Andrew Roberts, Phone conversation with the author, 16 June 2016.
[710] *Holy Habits*, p. 54.

Christ.'[711] Holy habits follows this pattern, envisioning Christian growth occurring through participation in key practices of the church until they become 'holy habits,' embedded in the attitudes and behaviours that constitute our character. Here we are reminded of Wesley and the communal practices of the early Methodists, though the underlying influences are MacIntyre, Hauerwas, and the new perspectives on Christian formation previously discussed, especially the work of Dykstra and Maria Harris, whose exposition of Acts 2:42-47 is a precursor of Roberts's *Holy Habits*, centred on the identical scriptural passage. The recent work of philosopher, Clare Carlisle, *On Habit* (2014), also illuminates the importance of habit in Christian formation, citing the Eucharist as an example in relation to 'the twin conditions of habit:' receptivity and resistance, by which 'we become more or less receptive to certain influences, and more or less resistant to others.'

> We create a particular pattern of receiving and resisting that comes to characterize our whole way of being in the world… ethical or spiritual practice... [aims] to develop *receptivity to the good*, and resistance to whatever hinders or threatens this.[712]

In devising *Holy Habits*, whether inadvertently or providentially, Roberts and the Birmingham Circuit have developed a programme of personal and communal formation that may be described, at least in part, as a contemporary expression of the early Wesleyan holiness tradition. In so doing, they show how the re-appropriation of the tradition may yet be achieved. They also confirm my contention that recent philosophical, theological, ethical, and educational perspectives provide a context that not only allows for such retrieval but may also unwittingly stimulate it in new and contemporary ways. Importantly, they recognise the need to achieve ownership and

[711] Ibid., pp. 54, 108.
[712] Clare Carlisle, *On Habit*, ed. Simon Critchley and Richard Kearney, Thinking in Action (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 132-3.

embed the programme thoroughly at local level, advising those considering embarking upon *Holy Habits* that they ensure that key stakeholders are on-board (i.e. 'ministers, lay preachers, stewards, church stewards etc.'), and that it permeates every level of local church and circuit life.[713] This will be vital for any re-appropriation of Wesleyan holiness.

From beyond

The re-emergence of holiness at connexional and local level takes place in a wider ecumenical context that appears conducive to key elements of the early Wesleyan holiness tradition, indicating that contemporary currents in Christian faith and practice may prove fruitful for its retrieval. Three such examples are: research on Christian growth, the renewed interest in virtue, and the terminology of holiness itself.

Growth

Recent research on how churchgoers view their 'growth and formation' has been published in *What helps disciples grow?* by St Peter's Saltley Trust, a Christian educational charity, linked to the Church of England yet working ecumenically.[714] Trialled in Methodist, Anglican, and unaffiliated churches,[715] the conclusions of the resulting survey, conducted in thirty churches of various denominations across five West Midland counties and generating 1194 responses, paint 'a hopeful and even joyous picture of Christians committed to developing their own growth in faith,'

[713] 'Holy Habits Programme Availability,' The Birmingham Methodist Circuit, https://www.birminghammethodistcircuit.org.uk/holy-habits/holy-habits-programme-availability/ accessed 31 March 2017.
[714] Simon Foster, 'What helps disciples grow? A summary of our research in 2015,' (2016), http://www.saltleytrust.org.uk/whdg/ accessed 28 April 2016.
[715] 'That was March,' SaltleyTrust, https://watchingtheflocks.wordpress.com/2015/04/07/that-was-march/ accessed 17 July 2019.

establishing the wide range of activities that have proved helpful and identifying 'four distinct pathways of discipleship:' Church worship, group activity, individual experience, and public engagement.[716]

The commitment to personal growth that the research identifies indicates an openness to this essential element in the early Wesleyan holiness tradition, and the breadth of activities deemed to be helpful echo the tradition's emphasis on the means of grace, so vital to Wesley. In response to statements concerning when they as individuals/church communities 'feel most alive,' the top two responses were identical, reflecting Wesley's emphasis on works of mercy and on social holiness: showing 'God's love in practical ways' (40%)/'Giving practical help or support to those in need' (47%), and 'Experiencing God through those around me, in fellowship, conversation or activity' (36%)/'Grow closer together in our shared life as a fellowship' (31%).[717] Significantly, 'Helping each other live more like Christ in our thought, speech and action,' came a close third for church communities (26%), with 23% of respondents indicating that feeling 'God helping me become more Christ-like…' was of personal importance.[718] Though the survey was based on a relatively small sample, the fact that it was overseen by a Board of Reference, including the eminent Professor Leslie J. Francis, Anglican theologian, Paula Gooder, and Methodist Minister, Andrew Roberts,[719] provides sufficient assurance to deduce that an appetite exists for Christian growth, even toward holiness (though the terminology is not used), offering a fruitful context for the retrieval of the early Wesleyan holiness tradition.

[716] 'What helps disciples grow?'. p. 2.
[717] Ibid., pp. 15-16.
[718] Ibid.
[719] Ibid., p. 20.

Virtue

An important contribution to understanding how the virtue tradition both informed and was transformed in early Christianity is provided by New Testament scholar, Tom Wright, who argues in *Virtue Reborn*, that it provides the 'habit-forming, character-forming' pathway to genuine human living in accord with the *telos* of God's new Heaven and new earth.[720] Accordingly, Wright proposes that we re-engage with this 'reborn' virtue tradition and take up the scriptural invitation to become what we already are in Christ, which is neither a matter of obeying rules or following our desires, but the transformation of our characters through the work of the Holy Spirit and our cooperative engagement.[721] As a Pauline expert, Wright importantly insists that this is not justification by works, since this 'conscious shaping of our patterns of behaviour… takes place within the framework of grace.'[722] Reminiscent of Wesley and Dykstra, Wright argues that participation in the 'virtuous circle' of Christian practices – 'scripture, stories, examples, community, and practices' – does not provide an automatic path to virtue or holiness: what is required is 'that our conscious mind and heart need to understand, ponder and consciously choose the patterns of life which these practices are supposed to produce in us and through us.'[723]

In his endorsement of *Virtue Reborn*, Timothy Wright states, 'This book is about what used to be called sanctification, the shaping of character by the following of Christ.'[724] As such, it is an important example of the re-emergence of holiness, even though its focus is on virtue. It helps us understand how Wesley read holiness off the pages of

[720] Tom Wright, *Virtue Reborn* (London: SPCK, 2010).
[721] Ibid., p. 6.
[722] Ibid., p. 54.
[723] Ibid., pp. 221-44.
[724] Ibid., p. i.

the New Testament, formed as he was within the tradition of the virtues. We see also a contemporary rebuttal of accusations of works righteousness, so frequently aimed at Wesley, and therefore a defence of the importance of works of mercy and piety in forming Christ-like character.

Holiness

Unabashed by the terminology, and with characteristic freshness and insight, theologian and former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, devotes a chapter to 'holiness' in his recent book, *Being Disciples: Essentials of the Christian Life*.[725] Removing any doubt that it can be detached from the realities of life, Williams locates the essence of holiness in Jesus' desire 'to sanctify himself…by stepping forwards towards his death, towards the cross.'

> Holiness in the New Testament is a matter of Jesus going right into the middle of the mess and the suffering of human nature. For him, being holy is being absolutely involved, not being absolutely separated.'[726]

Williams importantly reminds us that 'the Christian idea of holiness is to do with going where it's most difficult, in the name of Jesus who went where it was most difficult. He wants us to be holy like that.'[727] This reflects the work of Wesleyan theologian, Joerg Rieger, who argues that 'the divine is more often experienced in the midst of the pressures of life than on the mountaintops' and that works of mercy, understood correctly, are 'no longer primarily projects of "outreach," they become places of God's "inreach," where transformation occurs.[728] On this basis, Williams describes holy

[725] Rowan Williams, *Being Disciples: Essentials of the Christian Life* (London: SPCK, 2016). For a further set of essays by Williams on the theme of holy living, see also *Holy Living: The Christian Tradition for Today* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).
[726] *Being Disciples*, pp. 47-8.
[727] Ibid., p. 49.
[728] Joerg Rieger, *Grace under Pressure: Negotiating the Heart of the Methodist Traditions* (Nashville, Tennessee: United Methodist General Board of Higher Education, 2011), pp. 9-13.

persons, or saints, as those who enlarge the world for others by their involvement in it, allowing 'us to see not them, but God,' whilst offering this cautionary advice: 'if you want to be holy, stop thinking about it.'[729] Instead, practice 'the two "simple" yet "difficult" things that comprise 'the path of holiness:'

> *looking* – looking at Jesus, looking at what God is like, looking at the gospel, and all that that means; and *exploring* – exploring where human beings are, what their needs are, what they are calling us to do, how we may make them more human.[730]

Williams's advice resonates with the Wesleyan vision, focussed on love of God and neighbour. Though Williams appears to challenge the claims to sanctity or perfection that we find in some Wesleyan interpretations, his call to self-forgetfulness and to looking only to God reflects both Wesley's appeal, 'Have no end, no ultimate end, but God,'[731] and the experience of the early Methodists of being 'lost in wonder, love, and praise!'[732]

In conclusion, all these 'fresh expressions' of holiness – emerging from the centre, the local, and beyond Methodism – are positive indicators of a changing church culture that is increasingly sympathetic to the expression of key elements of the early Wesleyan holiness tradition. They confirm my contention that the developments we have noted in philosophical, theological, ethical, and educational enquiry are providing a context in which there is potential for its retrieval. The culture of our times may itself be a means of grace in which God is presenting the Methodist Church with the gift of re-appropriating its core tradition. But a favourable context and a few 'fresh

[729] Williams, *Being Disciples*, pp. 51-3.
[730] Ibid., p. 56.
[731] Wesley, 'The Circumcision of the Heart,' I.13, in *Works*, 1:408.
[732] Charles Wesley, hymn 503 in *Singing the Faith*, Music ed. (London: Hymns Ancient & Modern, on behalf of Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, 2011).

expressions' of holiness, however welcome, are unlikely, by themselves, to result in the retrieval of Methodism's founding tradition without comprehensive and concerted action. 'Means of grace,' they may be, but without discernment and wholehearted cooperative response, the gift of God will be missed. What then is the action that might be required, the response that might be made, if Methodism is to seize the moment, receive the gift, and begin to recover and re-express the dynamic of its holiness tradition?

4.3 Holistic Retrieval: Articulating a vision of the Christian life

The attempt to retrieve Wesleyan holiness for the twenty-first century must surely begin with a renewed appreciation and articulation of the holistic nature of John Wesley's vision of the Christian life that generated and inspired a movement, providing the conceptual framework in which formation in holiness of heart and life took place. Wesley held out the goal of Christ-like transformation, established its scriptural and theological basis, understood the affective nature of God's grace and how it may be apprehended in the means God has provided, recognised the importance of graced habituated action in growth toward maturity, realised the necessary correspondence between the 'religion of the heart' and its expression in the everyday lives of Christians, called for transformative mission, particularly in relation to the poor, the marginalised, and the oppressed, and, finally, organised the people called Methodists into societies, classes, and bands to facilitate the realisation of God's purposes in their lives, and through their witness, in wider society. Wesley's holistic vision demonstrates an awareness of the interrelatedness of holiness, formation, and

mission, and offers a model for the holistic retrieval of the early Wesleyan holiness tradition in contemporary Methodism, and even beyond.

If Wesley's successors are to benefit, however, from the insights of the Wesleyan holiness tradition in their formation, then it will be necessary for the Methodist Church to provide a corresponding conceptual framework. I suggest that this will require the Church to articulate a vision of the Christian life in which holiness of heart and life is fundamental and matches the comprehensive nature of Wesley's system. It will involve a cultural change permeating every level of Church life. Such a change, however, is necessary irrespective of whether Wesleyan holiness is retrieved, as I suggested in *Becoming 21st Century Disciples*, where I called for the prioritization of Christian formation:

> Christian formation begins and ends with God. It names the process by which we are 'conformed to the image of his Son' (Romans 8:29). It is an intentional process, but that intention originates not with us but in the very heart of God. It is a communal process, because we are called with others to share in the life of the Trinitarian God whose gifts are given, as St Paul reminds us, 'to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ' (Ephesians 4:13). Christian formation is transformational. The goal is to become like Christ. But as we journey into Christ-likeness, graced by the Spirit, we are directed to serve a yet greater purpose: the life of the kingdom, as we share, through transformational living, in God's mission to the world.[733]

This description of Christian formation could equally apply to Wesleyan holiness. Hence the contention of this thesis that the Methodist Church already has the resources within its own founding tradition to make the Christian formation of God's people a missional priority: Wesleyan holiness is Christian formation *par excellence*.

[733] Mullins, 'Becoming 21st Century Disciples,' p. 11.

The exciting prospect is that in this new century, the changed perspectives, identified earlier, provide a fruitful context for holistic retrieval and a singular opportunity for the Methodist Church to re-appropriate its core tradition by articulating a comprehensive vision of the Christian life that will guide its practice of Christian formation and mission in the years ahead.

Telos

The goal or *telos* of the Christian life according to the Wesleyan tradition is to become like Christ. This is a vital dynamic without which no truthful retrieval can be achieved. A vital task for the Methodist Church, therefore, is to proclaim the Christ-like life as the goal for every Christian. It may be argued that Methodism's current emphasis on discipleship, re-describing itself as a 'discipleship movement shaped for mission,' already implies this.[734] Whilst this may be true – a disciple, after all, is one who follows in the way of Christ to become more like him – a definite emphasis on the *telos* of discipleship will be needed if the *teleological* nature of Wesleyan holiness is to be recovered. The *telos* of Christ-likeness delineates the Christian life as a journey, with purpose and direction, that invites change and growth towards maturity in Christ. "I offered them Christ" are the words that Wesley frequently records in his journal.[735] He understood, as we are called to understand, that there is so much more to the Christian life than conversion, or belonging to a church, whether traditional or 'fresh expression.' In Christ, we are offered the full scope of salvation, or 'full salvation,' in Wesley's terminology:[736] union with Christ and transformation in his likeness. This is

[734] According to the 2005 Conference report, *Time to Talk of God*, 'the goal of discipleship is to grow ever more Christ-like in every aspect of life.' See: *Time to Talk of God: Recovering Christian conversation as a way of nurturing discipleship* (London: The Methodist Church, 2005), p. 19.
[735] Ian M. Randall, 'Methodist Spirituality,' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to World Methodism*, ed. William Gibson, Peter Forsaith, and Martin Wellings, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), p. 305.
[736] Wesley, 'The Scripture Way of Salvation,' 1.9, *Works*, 2:160.

the *telos* of the Christian life that the Methodist Church is invited to retrieve and proclaim.

Character

As Hauerwas reminds us, sanctification is best understood as the formation of Christ-like character. This accords with Wesley's understanding, rooted as he was in the tradition of the virtues, with its emphasis on character development and love as the highest expression of Christian virtue, and in his use of the term in *The Character of a Methodist,* 'The first tract I ever wrote expressly on this subject [perfection].'[737] Wesley recognised that being a Christian was not ultimately about right beliefs but about the kind of person that you are, or more correctly, becoming. If the early Wesleyan holiness tradition is to be retrieved, an emphasis on the nurture of Christian character must form a vital part of its recovery, for which the renaissance of the virtue tradition provides a fruitful platform. There is certainly a need to recover this emphasis, as Maddox argues, referring to research by Robin Gill and others which suggests that 'contemporary mainline churches seem to be less effective than their predecessors in instilling and strengthening' the 'individual moral character that culture requires but cannot facilitate itself.'[738] This is an invitation to recover Wesleyan holiness, with its emphasis on character formation. However, the temptation to neglect its own tradition in favour of secular managerial models remains strong, as evidenced by the introduction of 'accompanied self-appraisals,' 'ministerial development reviews,' and most recently, 'supervisions,' in the ongoing formation of

[737] Wesley, 'Plain Account,' §10, ibid., 13:142.
[738] Randy L. Maddox, 'Theology in the Twenty-First Century: Some Wesleyan Agendas,' in *Methodism Across the Pond: Perspectives Past and Present on the Church in Britain and America*, ed. Richard Sykes, (Oxford: Applied Theology Press, 2005), p. 50.

its ministers.'[739] And whilst references to Wesleyan holiness are to be welcomed in the new 'Ministerial Code of Conduct,'[740] they serve to justify the introduction of the code rather than emphasize the vocation to excellence of character, which was the 'ethos' of Wesley's system, even though rules had their place. I maintain, therefore, that the Church needs to regain confidence in its own tradition, or rather, in the transformative grace of God to which the tradition firmly points.

Grace

The Christ-like life is not only a goal in the Wesleyan tradition, it is a scriptural promise. As Heitzenrater states, Wesley regarded such injunctions as '"Be ye holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16)' and '"Be ye perfect, even as your father in heaven is perfect" (Matt 5:48)…as possible of fulfilment in this lifetime since a divine command must be considered a covered promise – God will help you achieve the goal.'[741] That help comes in the form of God's grace. A renewed emphasis on grace, therefore, is another vital contributor to contemporary retrieval. To call for this may seem surprising when Methodists are renowned for their hearty singing of 'the triumphs of his [God's] grace.'[742] But apprehending the importance of God's grace in our Christian formation

[739] The Division of Ministries first commended "Accompanied Self-Appraisal" for presbyters and deacons to the 1992 Methodist Conference, see The Methodist Division of Ministries. 'Accompanied Self-Appraisal,' in *Methodist Conference Agenda 1992* (Methodist Church, 1992), p. 39. A ten-year review of the scheme at the 2006 Conference eventually led to its replacement by the 'Ministerial Development Review'. See The Methodist Church. 'Accompanied Self-Appraisal,' in *Methodist Conference Agenda 2006* (Methodist Church, 2006). Also 'Ministerial Development Review,' https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-ministers-and-office-holders/ministry/ministerial-development-review/ accessed 17 March 2019. In 2017 the Methodist Conference agreed that all presbyters and deacons should be subject to ongoing supervision. See 'Supervision Policy,' Methodist Church Conference Agenda 2017, https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-2017-19-Supervision-Policy.pdf accessed 17 March 2019.

[740] 'Ministerial Code of Conduct,' http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/2481893/counc-MC17-18-Ministerial%20Code%20of%20Conduct-january-2017.pdf accessed 03 May 2017.

[741] Wesley adds, 'To think otherwise is to conceive of God as devious, which is unthinkable.' Heitzenrater, 'The Exercise of the Presence of God,' pp. 66-7.

[742] Charles Wesley, hymn 364 in *Singing the Faith*.

can be overlooked, if the focus falls on ourselves, rather than on God. We can see this by contrasting the discipleship discourse with Wesleyan holiness. Whilst both involve growth in Christian maturity, with the Christ-like life as their goal, there is a difference in emphasis: discipleship focusses on the human response to the call of Christ, whereas the holiness tradition highlights the transformational activity of God in which the disciple is called to participate as s/he makes that response. Holiness, therefore, brings grace more clearly to the fore, and since this was foundational for Wesley, it is this emphasis that needs to be recaptured if the Wesleyan holiness tradition is to inform contemporary Christian formation. This means recovering an appreciation of God's grace not only 'in the *passive* sense' as God's unmerited favour, a distinction drawn by Heitzenrater, but particularly 'in the *active* sense as the presence and power of God in our lives.'[743] This further invites a deeper appreciation of 'the means of grace' in both our discerning and responding to God.

Means of grace

The formational importance of the means of grace for Christian growth cannot be understated. Their re-appropriation in the hearts and minds of the Methodist people will be critical to the recovery of Wesleyan holiness. Wesley never abandoned the view, sharpened in the 'Stillness' controversy, that God provides the means through which we are both justified and sanctified. Holiness was not simply an ideal for Wesley, but a disciplined way of life in which God's transformative grace is ever available, nurturing the practical expression of the ideal in our lives through active

[743] Heitzenrater, 'The Exercise of the Presence of God,' pp. 70-73. Heitzenrater describes grace as, 'God's presence in human experience, God's energy transforming human beings, God's power energizing human activities for good – these are all facets of God's presence, energy, and power working in the lives of people. We call this present activity of God the work of the Holy Spirit, but with a Trinitarian understanding, the work of Christ and of the Holy Spirit are one with the work of God the Father.' ibid., p. 71.

participation in the instituted, prudential, and general means of grace. As Thompson remarks, they offer 'an entire model for living the Christian life in a way that leads to true spiritual growth.'[744] Yet I would suggest that many Methodists are unaware of their nature and significance – Thompson's book, *The Means of Grace: Traditioned Practice in Today's World*, would provide an excellent start. In the current context, where virtue, discipleship, and the formational role of Christian practices are coming to the fore, and with Dykstra viewing them as means of grace, a renewed focus and clear teaching on their contemporary significance is overdue:

> The means of grace are, most fundamentally, practices of discipleship that we embrace in an ongoing way within the community of faith. Their power is not in the practices themselves, but rather in the grace that those practices mediate through the Holy Spirit. Yet the practices are important; when they are engaged in a disciplined way, they become holy habits that work to transform us in heart and life.[745]

Thompsons' description of the means of grace as 'holy habits,' quite independent of the *Holy Habits Programme*, confirms my point: there is an open door to the recovery of the means of grace as formational practices for the contemporary church. Their renewed appreciation will also help reinstate Holy Communion – so essential to Wesley in nurturing holiness – to its central place within Methodist spirituality and practice. It will likewise underwrite the importance of works of mercy, which Rieger reminds us were given priority over works of piety by Wesley, and 'must now be understood as channels of God's grace…which transforms the doer of mercy as well' as those 'under pressure and at the margins,' lest we forget that solidarity with those in need in our world is always our vocation.[746]

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[744] Thompson, *The Means of Grace*, p. 135.
[745] Ibid., p. 17.
[746] Rieger, *Grace under Pressure*, p. 33. See also, Wesley, 'On Zeal,' II.5-9, *Works*, 3:313-14.

Heart

If the Methodist Church is to avoid the mistakes of Wesley's successors, an understanding of his affectional moral psychology will need to inform contemporary expressions of Wesleyan holiness. Whilst for Wesley, inward renewal and external practice were always intimately related, hence the importance of the means of grace for nurturing holy affections, it was at the affectional level of the heart that he viewed real change taking place.[747] That is why 'heart' comes before 'life' in Wesley's characteristic phrase, 'holiness of heart and life.'

The challenge for contemporary retrieval is how to re-envision this vital affectional dynamic today when the terminology of the affections and tempers is no longer a realistic option, having been overtaken by that of the emotions, which are generally interpreted in a reductive way, as impulses, passions, and feelings, and fail to incorporate the cognitive dimension so vital to Wesley's understanding. [748] Thankfully Gregory Clapper and Theodore Runyon offer ways forward as they re-establish 'experience' as vital to Wesleyan retrieval by proposing what Clapper calls 'the "three ortho" pattern.'[749] They remind us that Wesley viewed the Christian life as more than *orthodoxy* (right beliefs) and *orthopraxis* (right actions), by introducing a third component: *orthokardia* (right heart), Clapper;[750] and *orthopathy* (right feelings, affections, and in the larger sense, *experience*), Runyon.[751]

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[747] Chilcote states: 'Wesley's understanding of perfection focused on the heart, which he conceived as the deepest dispositions of the person, from which one's actions flow.' Chilcote, 'Introduction,' in *Works*, 13:24.
[748] See Gregory S. Clapper, *The Renewal of the Heart is the Mission of the Church: Wesley's Heart Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), pp. 33-51.
[749] Ibid., p. 92.
[750] Ibid., pp. 68-88.
[751] Runyon, *The New Creation*, pp. 146-67. See also, *Exploring the Range of Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), pp. 141-55.

Rebutting the notion that Christian experience is merely subjective, both Clapper and Runyon establish its objective nature, with Clapper asserting, 'What makes an affection Christian (or "religious" or "gracious") is the object which engenders it."[752] Hence, 'the witness of our own spirit… is the contingent result of our taking as the object of our affections God and what God has done for us.'[753] Likewise, Runyon refers to Wesley's understanding of the 'perceptibility of grace,' and how 'being touched by the Spirit of God… is precisely what has the power to transform, to bring new life, to renew the image of God.'[754] Both agree that 'the affections have not only their genesis outside the self, but their *telos* as well,' with Clapper stating that 'we are naturally led to do the "works of mercy" by the love of God and neighbour which has grown within us,'[755] and Runyon emphasing how 'orthopathic experience… not only modifies us in our being but makes us partners with God in God's transformation of the world.'[756]

In re-envisioning the affectional nature of Wesleyan holiness, Clapper and Runyon, with their respective proposals of *orthokardia* and *orthopathy*, help explain and confirm the ethical, theological and educational resonances that we discovered earlier, revealing its correspondence with contemporary currents in Christian formation. Growth in holiness occurs through an ever-deepening relationship with God, a work of God's grace in our hearts evoking our loving response, by which we are formed and transformed as we participate in God's loving purposes for our lives, the church, and

[752] Clapper, *The Renewal of the Heart*, p. 85. Clapper refers to their '*transitive*, nature: they take objects.' ibid., p. 51.
[753] Ibid., p. 60.
[754] Runyon, *The New Creation*, p. 159.
[755] Clapper, *The Renewal of the Heart*, pp. 86-7.
[756] Runyon, *Exploring the Range of Theology*, pp. 149-50.

the world. This may seem obvious, but it remains the vital insight that needs constant affirmation and articulation in the church, and for this reason I agree with Clapper that 'shaping that metaphorical centre of the human called the "heart,"' should be the basis of 'Christian formation and theological education,' and central to the church's worship, preaching, counselling and evangelism,[757] and, I would add, small groups, whose content and style usually engage the 'head' more than the 'heart.'

Perfect love

From its inception, Wesley's understanding of Christian Perfection has come under critical scrutiny, particularly in relation to what constitutes perfection and the idea that it is attainable in this life. A particular focus has been on the nature of sin and how human beings may be freed from its consequences, not only through the forgiveness that comes with justification, but also in the actuality of their everyday lives. Wesley was constantly having to respond to queries and criticisms of his favoured doctrine, and each clarification led to further questions and responses which failed to satisfy his critics, resulting in a not entirely consistent setting forth of the *grand depositum*. Wesley's successors have similarly struggled. They have been forced to argue over their interpretations of the destruction or eradication of sin, of whether perfection is instantaneous or gradual, and in what sense it is attainable at all. With the advance of the social sciences and modern psychology, the arguments and answers provided by Wesley and his successors have appeared unsatisfactory and lacked credibility. This in turn has served to undermine Wesleyan holiness so that even those who have sought to promote it, such as Flew and Sangster, have conceded its weaknesses, whilst

[757] Clapper, *The Renewal of the Heart*, pp. 99-131. For example, in the case of evangelism it means seeing it as 'a lifelong process of being continually conformed to the image of God, a lifelong project of renewing the heart, or "spiritual formation."' ibid., p. 125.

Methodism in general has found it an unnecessary embarrassment and quietly ignored it. Therefore, if the tradition is to be retrieved, a more helpful way of articulating Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection will be needed. I propose that the most fruitful starting point is to leave aside the exhausted and disputatious nature of past discussions and begin with what Wesley considered 'the *essence* of it' – *'perfect love.'*[758]

Love of God and neighbour had been Wesley's consistent understanding of Christian perfection since 'The Circumcision of the Heart' in 1733. A half-century later, he reasserted this view in a quickly penned sermon, stating that 'the sum of Christian perfection…is all comprised in that one word, love.'[759] And whilst we can agree with Outler that Wesley viewed salvation as 'the recovery of our negative power not to sin and our positive power to love God supremely,' its essential dynamic was a positive focus on God who is love, not on our sin.[760] That is why Wesley underlined the need for 'a single eye,'[761] and defined perfection as 'love excluding sin.'[762] Wesley's positive focus on love, therefore, provides the most promising basis for contemporary retrieval, enabling Methodism to recapture the dynamic, relational, and affectional nature of Wesleyan holiness through a corresponding focus on God's perfect love, the source and the goal of all holiness.

Taking this a step further, the love that captivated Wesley's imagination was not primarily our responsive love for God, but God's perfect love, evoking and empowering

[758] Wesley, 'Plain Account,' §26, *Works*, 13:187.
[759] Wesley, 'On Perfection,' I.4, ibid., 3:74.
[760] Albert C. Outler, Sermon 40, 'Christian Perfection: An Introductory Comment,' ibid., 2:97.
[761] John Wesley, Sermon 148, 'A Single Intention' (1736), I.4, ibid., 4:374.
[762] Wesley, 'The Scripture Way of Salvation,' I.9, ibid., 2:160.

our love for God and neighbour. Runyon makes this the basis of his interpretation of Wesley's doctrine, shifting the focus from 'our own perfection' to 'the perfection of that which we receive' – God's perfect love, graciously shared 'with those called to be God's image,' such that we both 'receive and participate in God's love.'[763] In making this shift, Runyon raises our horizons, releasing us from a pre-occupation with our own perfection to embrace our missional vocation:

> … not just to receive but to reflect this love into the world… and to share it perfectly, that is, to share it in such a way that it can be received and appropriated by others as a love whose source is God.[764]

In this way, Runyon overcomes the thorny matter of personal attainment, whilst emphasising the ongoing growth toward maturity Wesley regarded as essential, even for claimants to the experience of perfect love: 'Our sanctification… is an ever-beckoning, never finished project, even though the love we redirect is complete as it comes from the divine source.'[765] But Runyon does not ignore the 'negation of sin,' nor limit it to the personal realm, because 'God's perfect love,' he suggests, is 'a critical principle' that 'forms and informs the Christian conscience with sensitivity to heaven's war against the forces of evil.'[766] Accordingly, Runyon argues that 'the greatest strength of the Wesleyan doctrine of perfection may lie in its ability to mobilize believers to seek a more perfect future that surpasses the present' because 'it does not take [negative forces] as the inevitable and unavoidable consequences of original sin, but precisely as that which can be overcome.'[767]

[763] Runyon, *The New Creation*, p. 225.
[764] Ibid.
[765] Ibid.
[766] Ibid., p. 227.
[767] Ibid., pp. 227-8.

In re-envisioning Wesleyan holiness in terms of the transformational activity of God's perfect love in our lives, Runyon signals a way forward for retrieval, capturing the essence of Wesley's optimism of grace for the twenty-first century. By taking God's perfect love as our starting point, we are invited to see that the transformation of the individual and of the world are inseparable. Holiness, interpreted as the perfect love of a holy God toward all creation, offers no retreat into individual piety nor escape from the personal transformation that societal engagement demands. It closes a divide that for too long has frustrated holistic mission and seen the abandonment of the Wesleyan holiness tradition at a time when it offers the very resources that we need for contemporary mission.

Holiness and Happiness

In his stimulating book, *Reclaiming holiness for the world today*, which is to be thoroughly commended for offering Methodists an accessible, biblical and contemporary understanding of their founding tradition, British Methodist minister, Calvin Samuel, describes 'holiness' as a 'Mufasa' word.[768] He is referring to a scene in *The Lion King* in which the very mention of the name Mufasa, the king of the jungle, sends shivers down the spine of a hyena.[769] 'Holiness,' Samuel suggests, has a similar effect on many people today: it has 'an image problem.'[770] But should it? Jesus of Nazareth drew crowds wherever he went, such was the attraction of his person. He is the exemplar of holiness, 'the image of the invisible God' (Colossians 1:15), in whose likeness we are created and invited to become. Christ-like holiness is attractive, at

[768] Calvin T. Samuel, *More> Distinct: Reclaiming holiness for the world today* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), p. 1.
[769] *The Lion King*, 1994, is a Walt Disney film.
[770] Samuel, *More> Distinct*, p. 1.

home in the world, at ease before God and neighbour, whether friend or stranger. It is neither stuffy, dour, nor off-putting – Jesus Christ was the friend of tax-collectors and sinners, he loved to party as much as to pray, to feast as much as to fast. There is, therefore, something intrinsically wrong with portrayals of holiness that fail to capture the essence of the Christian life in all its gifted brilliance, described so graphically by Sam Wells as…

> …so illuminating, so beautiful, that it attracts commitment by the sheer acuteness of its own rendering. Like a recipe, it makes one want to cook the meal; like a travel guide, it makes one want to visit the country; like a gospel, it makes one want to follow Christ: not because it tells one to, but because one longs to turn the wonder of the description into lived experience. In short, it captures the imagination.[771]

That is the challenge set before the contemporary church: to inspire, nurture, and sustain Christian lives that capture the imagination in twenty-first century postmodern Britain in much the same way as the early Methodists did in their age, when holiness proved attractive, being an intensification of what most people believed, unlike in today's increasingly secular context. What connects their world to ours, however, is the ubiquitous human desire for happiness.

John Wesley, like Aquinas, linked happiness with holiness. Happiness was not to be found, however, in the self-contained inner world of the individual, but in relationship with God. As Wesley said, 'You are made to be happy in God.'[772] At a time when people intensify their search for meaning in life, and when the struggle to find it is reflected in rising mental health problems, addictive behaviours, and wistful

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[771] Samuel Wells, *God's Companions: Reimagining Christian Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 3.

[772] Cited in Rebekah L. Miles, 'Happiness, holiness, and the moral life,' in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Wesley, 'The Unity of the Divine Being,' §10Wesley, *Works*, 4:64.

dissatisfaction even amidst material wellbeing, holiness, as Rowan Williams suggests, is "a way of pointing to those lives in which something 'works.'"[773]

Holy lives are invitational and empowering, pointing to the possibility of our own transformation, as they point 'to the reality of God coming alive in human words and human bodies.'[774] Presbyterian theologian, Ellen Charry's impressive study, *God and the Art of Happiness*, written out of personal grief and pain following the death of her husband in order to 'reclaim' happiness from its 'secular captivity,' reveals that the happiness that characterizes authentic Christian living is not superficial, but reaches deep into our humanity encompassing the wholeness of our lives. From a Methodist perspective, Sarah Heaner Lancaster's book, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, would be a good starting point for reflecting on the contemporary relevance of the search for happiness to the holiness tradition, and on the means of engaging with present concerns.[775]

The way in which holiness and happiness finds expression in the lives of individual Christians is something about which we should avoid being too prescriptive. Holiness is relational and we need to trust the grace of God at work in that relationship. The dangers of becoming fixated, even with the best of intentions, on certain behaviours and ways of life, such as the teetotalism we noted in nineteenth-century revivalism, and which created an atmosphere of exclusive respectability, are to be avoided. Jesus managed to steer a course that was both totally engaged with people in the complexities and ambiguities of their lives whilst providing hope and new possibilities

[773] Williams, *Holy Living: The Christian Tradition for Today*, p. 2.
[774] Ibid.
[775] Sarah Heaner Lancaster, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Blessing and Fulfillment in Christian Faith* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011).

of a transforming relationship with God. We must allow God to work within us. Love will find its way. It is not a matter of following rules, but of allowing the life of Christ to be formed within us as we immerse ourselves in the communal life of the church, engage in its practices that are means of grace, and become part of the story that shapes us: the story of Christ. As Lancaster concludes,

> If offering Christ to the world means offering people a chance to be happy in God, then the Church has something to say that people may truly want to hear.

In our consideration of the possibilities of holistic retrieval, I have highlighted the key elements of Wesley's vision of the Christian life – telos, character, grace, means of grace, affection, perfect love, holiness and happiness – that I suggest need clear articulation at all levels of the Methodist Church if the recovery of the holiness tradition is to be effective in informing its practice of Christian formation. I am not suggesting that examples of these cannot be found across the Methodist Church, but that we lack that holistic understanding of their mutual importance that comprised Wesley's comprehensive vision and that is characteristic of current understandings of Christian formation. It is the way that these elements, when woven together into the fabric of church life, combine to offer both an overarching vision of the Christian life as well as the means to make it our own, that is so exciting, rendering the recovery of the early Wesleyan holiness tradition long overdue.

4.4 Conclusions

In this chapter, we have considered whether the early Wesleyan holiness tradition has the potential for recovery to inform the practice of Christian formation in the contemporary Methodist Church. In the course of our endeavours, we have

demonstrated that the essential dynamics of the tradition resonate strongly with recent perspectives on Christian education, and how the re-appropriation of the virtue tradition, the renewed appreciation of the role of the affections, and a more profound understanding of the means of grace combine to bring key aspects of Wesley's world into our own, providing confidence in the possibilities of retrieval. That confidence has been strengthened as we considered signs of retrieval, albeit limited, and not necessarily drawing on the tradition itself though exhibiting clear resonance. The *Holy habits Programme* is a particularly encouraging example. Finally, we set out key elements that we suggest would enable the Methodist Church to engage in the recovery of the tradition by articulating a holistic vision of the Christian life that would inform the practice of Christian formation, with its Wesleyan *telos* of perfect love, and inspire Methodists and others to embrace it. Along the way, we received the advice of Rowan Williams that the key to holiness is to look to Jesus and explore our hurting world, or as Wesley would say, love God and love your neighbour. Without making any promises, yet hinting towards the adventure at hand, redolent with Wesley's optimism of grace, Williams suggests, 'start there, and who knows?'[776]

[776] Williams, *Being Disciples*, p. 56.

5 Conclusion

In my introduction I described this research as a personal project that had undergone a long period of germination. A missiological concern for the future of Christianity in Britain had convinced me of the vital importance of Christian formation for credible witness. An unexpected intuition that John Wesley's concern for holiness – notably absent in the Methodism that I knew – might itself be a form of Christian formation provided the impetus for the research and suggested its shape. I would revisit the tradition in order to understand it, trace its subsequent course to account for its apparent loss, and consider perspectives on Christian formation to determine its potential for retrieval. Now, as I conclude my project, I can report that the research process has been a continuation of that personal journey. I have recovered my Wesleyan roots and come to recognise their value for the contemporary church. What began as an intuition, became an hypothesis, has now been confirmed – and beyond what I initially imagined.

From the outset, my central argument has been that there is sufficient resonance between the early Wesleyan holiness tradition and recent perspectives on Christian formation to suggest that there may be grounds for the recovery of Methodism's 'lost' tradition in order to encourage and inform its practice of Christian formation, and nurture credible witnesses for twenty-first century mission. The research has confirmed this claim. The system of formation that we find in the communal life and practices of the early Methodists corresponds with the importance attached to formation in community by contemporary exponents of Christian formation. Wesley's emphasis on participation in the means of grace echoes the current prominence given to Christian practices. The purposeful nature of Wesley's system matches the

intentional programmes of present-day Christian educationalists, the aim being Christian growth, maturity in Christ, or in Wesley's terminology, holiness. In all these ways, there is resonance enough to substantiate my argument. But the research has uncovered a deeper resonance.

Recent Wesleyan scholarship has significantly enlarged our understanding of how Wesley envisaged growth in holiness taking place, revealing a striking correspondence with the insights of today's exponents of Christian formation. Moreover, these insights do not simply resonate with the Wesleyan tradition, they return to its fundamental aspects. Whilst most do not draw specifically on the Wesleyan tradition – of which they appear unaware, being from other Christian traditions – they do embrace its vocabulary, retrieving essential elements of Wesley's understanding, particularly in regard to virtue, affection, and the means of grace. Let us remind ourselves of this correspondence.

Heitzenrater's decoding of Wesley's Oxford diaries revealed how his understanding of holiness was informed by the virtue tradition that characterised medieval piety and provided the context for Wesley's formation within the Church of England. After two centuries of relative neglect (except by Thomists), the rehabilitation of the virtue tradition by MacIntyre and Hauerwas has not only provided a fruitful context for retrieval by recreating the ethical environment in which the tradition originated, but has established, among exponents of Christian formation, such as Fowler, that the 'generation of the virtues' is integral to personal growth and transformation.[777]

[777] The quotations in this chapter duplicate those previously cited unless otherwise stated.

Likewise, with the affections, a term well understood in Wesley's day but less so since, but which has received fresh attention from Maddox, Knight, and Clapper, who reveal the affectional nature of Wesley's moral psychology. They are all American Methodist scholars whose work in this area deserves to be more widely known in British Methodism. They have established the vital role of the affections in the dynamics of Wesleyan holiness: that the affections are 'awakened and thrive'[778] as God's love is experienced in the heart by the Holy Spirit, the key to Wesley's 'religion of the heart.' It is both surprising and significant that we find this same appreciation for the role of the affections in the work of Groome and Fowler. Groome refers to this 'affective/relational dimension' of faith as that which induces an ever-deeper love and trust in 'the One who is Love and who is most to be trusted.'[779] Fowler describes the affections in Wesleyan terms as 'deep dispositions of the heart,' viewing their 'formation' as integral to conversion, the lifelong process of change that takes place through the 'realignment of our affections,' as well as 'the restructuring of our virtues.'[780]

Then there are the means of grace. The recent scholarship of Maddox, Knight, Heitzenrater, and Thompson has increased our understanding of their role in nurturing holiness, providing 'an entire model for living the Christian life in a way that leads to true spiritual growth,' as Thompson states. When we turn to Dykstra, who has been instrumental in promoting Christian practices as vital for formation, we find that he

[778] Randy L. Maddox, 'Psychology and Wesleyan Theology: Precedents and Prospects for a Renewed Engagement,' *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 23 (2004): p. 103.
[779] Groome, *Sharing Faith*, p. 20.
[780] Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, pp. 93-4, 115.

now refers to Christian practices as 'means of grace,' and at 'the heart of what is conveyed by the biblical word *sanctification*.'

This research, therefore, makes an important contribution to both Wesley Studies and to the field of Christian formation by revealing the remarkable correspondence between the dynamics of Wesleyan holiness and the insights of contemporary Christian formation in the understanding of Christian growth. It confirms my initial hypothesis of resonance in even stronger terms than initially envisaged, supporting the central argument of this thesis for the recovery of the tradition.

The extent of this correspondence further reveals just how much was lost when Wesley's balanced understanding of holiness was tipped in favour of instantaneous attainment, marginalising its formational underpinning, and depriving Methodism of a proper appreciation of how growth in holiness takes place. At a time when attention to Christian formation is so urgently needed to meet the missiological challenge, it is not only to its contemporary exponents that we may now look, but also to Wesley, who, in encouraging Methodists in their pursuit of holiness, had remarkable prescience in grasping the dynamics of growth in the Christian life. This research, therefore, confirms, that it is not a question of whether the early Wesleyan holiness tradition *might* have potential for retrieval, but that it clearly *does* have such potential in view of its comprehensive insight into the dynamics of Christian formation. The tradition, therefore, deserves renewed attention within contemporary Methodism.

In accounting for the tradition's demise and loss, the research uncovered how subsequent interpretations became associated with a piety of respectability detached

from the everyday realities and pressing needs of wider society. Hugh Price Hughes was the first to distance himself from such interpretations, finding Christ-like engagement in society a more biblical approach. Many followed and bypassed the tradition altogether. By the time Christian theology made its turn to the world in the 1960s, the tradition and its settled interpretation as 'Second Blessing' holiness had become contentious at Cliff,[781] and seemed irrelevant elsewhere, resulting in its disappearance from Methodist discourse. Vincent led the way. He was not, however, leaving the tradition completely behind, as he claimed. He was reclaiming a fundamental aspect of it: the love of neighbour which calls for immersive engagement in the pattern of Christ. A radical, he was the first to embrace the terminology of 'discipleship' as the contemporary expression of Methodism, only to be followed later by evangelicals who, after David Watson's important book, *Discipleship* (1981),[782] though they may not have shared Vincent's social vision, saw discipleship as intrinsic to fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19). Vincent was pursuing holiness but without its terminology, and without the holistic understanding that would have helped nurture the committed disciples he sought. As Rieger reminds us, Wesley viewed 'works of mercy' as 'real means of grace,' places of God's "inreach" – not just our "outreach" – where we are encountered by God and transformation takes place.[783] Immersive engagement with the hurt, brokenness, and injustices of our world must form part of any future restatement of Wesleyan holiness – it is intrinsic to it.

But so is experience. We have noted the way that under revivalist influence the tradition was recast in favour of instantaneous attainment, the experience of the

[781] Mellor, 'Mission Theology and Praxis at Cliff College,' pp. 99-100.
[782] David Watson, *Discipleship* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1981).
[783] Rieger, *Grace under Pressure*, p. 42.

'Second Blessing.' And we have considered the judgements of Pope, Flew, and Sangster, that claims to perfection are unsustainable given our inability to know ourselves sufficiently, particularly in the light of modern psychology. This would appear to rule out the claims of early Methodists and their successors, casting doubt on their sincerity. But this is not the case. In his belief that charismatic experience had assimilated Wesleyan holiness and its 'Second Blessing' experience, Davies decouples claims to perfection from profound experiences of the Spirit. In the same way, Methodists today may, and should, continue to aspire to such moments of being '*all love* today,'[784] as Wesley describes them, holding perfect love as the goal of Christian life, whilst maintaining a self-forgetfulness that is not concerned with personal claims but only with the perfect love of God, graciously evoking a responsive love of God and neighbour, which, as Runyon suggests, is reflected in our 'missional vocation' to reflect God's perfect love in the world.

A systematic restatement of Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection lies beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is clearly something that awaits further attention, and towards which, I trust this thesis makes a contribution, as will the work of those whom I have drawn on in the course of this research. There is also further work to be done on the recoverability of the bands and classes. I have focussed on the change of culture that is required to bring an awareness of Wesley's dynamic vision of formation in community to the attention of the Methodist people, so that they may find ways of appropriating its vital elements in their own networks, and small group settings. There have been too many calls for the return of the classes that have proved fruitless to

[784] John Wesley, 'Plain Account,' *Works*, 13:188.

repeat them. If they are to be refashioned for the twenty-first century, they may best emerge from 'below' rather than imposed from 'above.' It begins with an awareness of how formation in holiness can be encouraged and supported within the mutual accountability of small groups and shared lives that Wesley's system demonstrated, and which may be re-appropriated, differently, but nonetheless with the same intent and effect according to the local circumstance. A significant contribution towards creating this awareness, would be the provision of materials for group and personal study that would serve as an accessible, informative, and inspiring guide to Wesleyan holiness and to its formational aspects and goal of Christ-like love.

Today's Methodism remains as diverse as ever it was in the late twentieth century. Holding its various constituencies within a shared identity remains a challenge. A 'discipleship movement shaped for mission' was adopted to that end in 2011. Surprisingly, however, the Methodist Conference of 2019 has changed the direction of travel, abandoning its new 'strap-line' and reverting to its 2000 statement, *Our Calling* as 'the primary strategic driver for the whole Church,' though retaining the terminology of discipleship which continues to serve as the overarching theme for its four key purposes as emphasised in *Our Calling*: 'Worship,' 'Learning and Caring,' 'Service,' and 'Evangelism.'

> *The calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission.*
> *(Our Calling Conference Report 2000)*[785]

[785] The Methodist Church, 'Developments in Reaffirming Our Calling,' https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/11678/conf-2019-16-developments-in-reaffirming-our-calling.pdf accessed 02 August 2019. 'Conference Business Digest 2019,' https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/12333/conf-2019-conference-business-digest-110719.pdf accessed 02 August 2019.

Our Calling predated the stirrings toward 'holiness' that surfaced during Atkins' tenure as General Secretary, and so it is not surprising that holiness does not feature. It is disappointing, however, that in returning to its previous missional statement, the Methodist Church shows little inclination, despite recent expressions of holiness, including that of Walton and Lampard in their Presidential year, of reclaiming its founding tradition. That discipleship is retained is welcome. In making a distinction between discipleship and holiness, as this thesis has done, our purpose has not been to oppose them, but rather to suggest that discipleship does not carry the same weight and emphasis as holiness. The same applies to *Our Calling*. But whether it be discipleship or *Our Calling*, it remains the contention of this thesis that Methodism's founding call to holiness of heart and life may yet prove a more enduring, and all-encompassing means of expressing its missional purpose. As we have seen, properly interpreted, and re-expressed, it holds within it the way, the means, and the goal of the Christian life, directing our hearts and minds to the love of God and neighbour, in response to, and empowered by God's perfect love for us, our world, and all creation.

This is all the more important given the publication of the 2018 British Social Attitudes Survey which highlights the scale of the missional challenge that Christianity faces in twenty-first century Britain.[786] It reveals that 'The proportion of the British population who identify as Christian has fallen dramatically over the last three decades,' with those identifying as Methodist dropping from 4% in 1983 to 1% in 2018, and of those who were brought up as Methodists only 27% continue to identify as such.[787]

> Taken as a whole, these patterns suggest secularisation is increasing on two fronts: the decline in overall levels of involvement with religion, and

[786] NatCen Social Research, 'British Social Attitudes 36,' http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39293/1_bsa36_religion.pdf accessed 02 August 2019.
[787] Ibid., pp. 5-6.

> consolidation of those who were wavering towards more confirmed secular positions.[788]

Such marked movement towards the secular only serves to strengthen my earlier contention that Christian formation is a missiological imperative. It reminds us of Lindbeck's answer to the question as to how one is to 'preach the gospel in a dechristianized world,' as he challenges Christians 'to cultivate their native tongue and learn to act accordingly.'[789] The early Wesleyan holiness tradition is the 'native tongue' of Methodists, yet struggling to find a voice in our time. Lindbeck invites contemporary Methodists to find their voice, as it were, and to teach the language and practices that constitute their Christian faith – and that means catechizing towards holiness of heart and life.

The purpose of retrieval, as Theodore Runyon remarks, is not 'to repeat the past or to honour the past for its own sake, but to allow the past to confront us in the present as it provides the key to unlock a richer future.'[790] That has been my aim throughout this research. As I conclude, I am reminded of the story told by Sadhu Sundar Singh of the beggar, who for twenty-one years sat in the same spot dreaming of becoming rich. After his death it was discovered that beneath where he sat a magnificent treasure lay buried that once belonged to a great king.[791] It is not too late for the Methodist Church to rediscover its buried treasure, and draw again on the rich resources of the early Wesleyan holiness tradition – lost but recoverable – to inform its practice of

[788] Ibid., p. 14.
[789] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, pp. 132-4.
[790] Runyon, *Exploring the Range of Theology*, p. 74.
[791] Wisdom of the Sadhu: Teachings of Sundar Singh, (Rifton, NY: The Plough Publishing House, 2011), http://data.plough.com/ebooks/wisdomsadhu.pdf accessed 16 June 2012. pp. 168-9.

Christian formation, to guide its mission, and to rediscover its calling: to become ‘a holy people.’

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